

COMMODORE ALEXANDER GILLON OF  
SOUTH CAROLINA, 1741-1794

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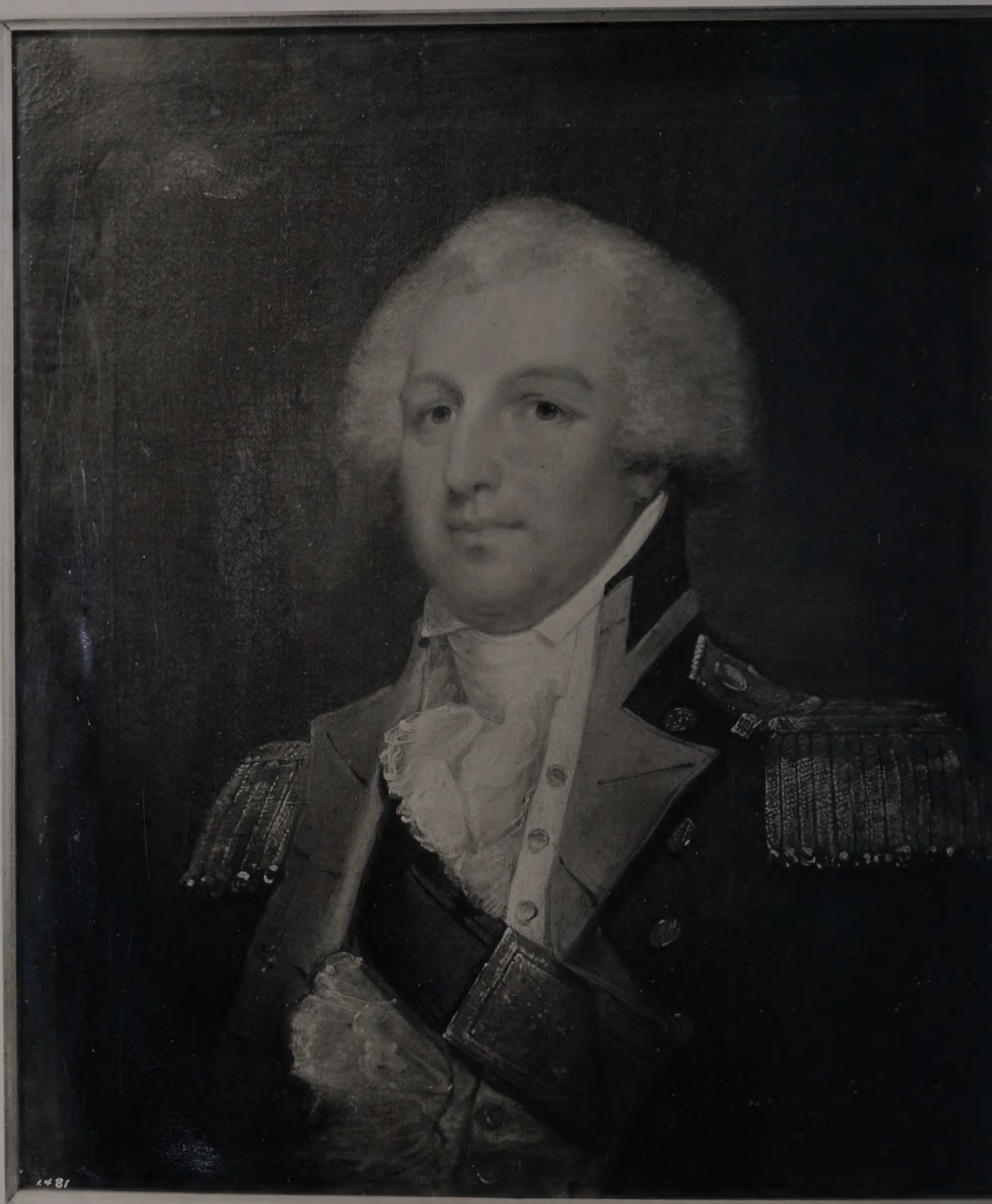














COMMODORE ALEXANDER GILLON, 1741-1794

This print was taken from a negative in the Frick Art Reference Library. The original painting, attributed to Gilbert Stuart, is in the possession of Carrington Beeman of New York City.

A Leaflet

submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts  
in the Graduate School  
of Arts and Sciences

of  
Duke University

1951

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## PREFACE

In this study of Commodore Alexander Gillon an effort was made to accumulate all the facts about his life and to arrange them chronologically.

Except for one article by D. E. Huger Smith in the "South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine", little has been written on this subject. As unpublished material which has never been utilized before was uncovered in the American Philosophical Society Library, the National Archives, the University of Pennsylvania Library, and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, some questions concerning Gillon's career have been answered. However, this is by no means a definitive work, and it is sincerely hoped that further research will reveal facts that will give a more complete picture of his life.

The writer would like to express his appreciation to E. Milby Burton, Director of the Charleston Museum, for suggesting this subject as a research problem, and to Professor Robert H. Woody and Charles S. Sydnor for guidance in the preparation of this study.

Berkeley Grimball  
Duke University  
Summer, 1951



COMMODORE ALEXANDER GILLON OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1741-1794.





## CHAPTER I

### SUCCESSFUL CHARLESTOWN MERCHANT

Alexander Gillon was the last child born to his father Alexander and his second wife Mary Harris.<sup>1</sup> Details of his arrival inscribed in the family Bible informs posterity that he was born in Rotterdam "On the Wine Street the North Side and East end, the Second House, on Sunday at one o'clock at Noon ye 13th day of August 1741, with a Caul<sup>2</sup> or curiosity

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1. Alexander Gillon, Sr. was born at Borrowtouness, Scotland, and on January 12, 1712 he married a local girl named Jannet Mathew. Gillon probably moved his family to Rotterdam, Holland in 1726 when he became associated with an English shipping firm established there.

In 1728 Jannet Gillon died, and sometime afterwards Gillon married a widow from Ireland named Mary Harris Swan. She became the mother of Alexander, Jr. (Information in a letter received from H. C. Hazewinkel, Archivist at the Archief Der Gemeente, Rotterdam, October 6, 1950).

2. A membrane enveloping the fetus, which sometimes covers the head of the child at its birth.





down to his eyes."<sup>3</sup>

Alexander's father went to sea as a young man and in 1726 he was made a ship's captain in the service of John Goddard, an English merchant, who had settled in Rotterdam. The Archivist at Rotterdam writes that Gillon senior was "a man of small circumstances, and lived for several years on the upper-story of a house in the Jan Slippensteeg among people of the lower classes." In later years his economic status improved somewhat and he was able to move to a more desirable section of Rotterdam. But he died a poor man in September of 1761, leaving behind two children, one of whom was young Alexander.<sup>4</sup>

With such a background, it was only natural that young Gillon would turn to the sea for a career. He received his early training in Dutch and English shipping companies; and in 1764, at the age of 23, became master and part owner of the brig "Surprise."<sup>4</sup> During that same year he made a voyage to America, arriving at Philadelphia on December 13.<sup>5</sup>

Early in 1765, Captain Gillon made a return trip to the colonies, and on January 23, brought the "Surprise" into Charlestown harbor for the first time.<sup>6</sup> The event was heralded

3. Allen E. Beeman, "Records from the Bible Belonging to Alexander Gillon," South Carolina Historical and Geneological Magazine, XIX (July, 1918), 146. Hereafter cited S.C.H.G.M.

4. Hazewinkel, October 6, 1950.

5. "Ship Registers For the Port of Philadelphia," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Bibliography, XXVII (July, 1903), 354.

6. South Carolina Gazette (Charlestown, S. C.), January 26, 1765.



by an advertisement in the South Carolina Gazette: "For Cowes and Holland. The Brig. Surprise Alexander Gillon, Master. Burthen about 500 barrels. Has half of her cargo already engaged. For freight of the remainder, treat with said master or, Torrans, Poang & Co."<sup>7</sup>

This was no frontier community harboring a backwoods society which Gillon saw as he moved about the streets of the city. Since 1730, when Governor Robert Johnson had removed a restraint upon the deportation of rice, the colony had begun its rise to a state of affluence.<sup>8</sup> The commercial importance of the town is illustrated by the fact that whereas 173 vessels arrived at Philadelphia in 1733, and 196 the year before at New York, 317 unloaded at Charlestown in 1735. The annual loadings averaged 220 ships, considerably more than any other Colonial port except Boston.<sup>9</sup> During the year of Gillon's arrival over 400 ships entered and were cleared at the port.<sup>10</sup>

Rice and indigo were the principal wealth producing commodities raised in Carolina. Indigo was planted in 1671 during the first year of the colony, but the easier building of fortunes through the cultivation of rice caused it to be neglected for a number of years. Interest revived in the 1740's

7. Ibid., January 26, 1765.

8. B. R. Carroll, Historical Collections of South Carolina (New York, 1836), I, 284.

9. James T. Adams, Provincial Society, 1690-1763, (New York, 1927), 208.

10. S. C. Gazette, Dec. 5, 1771.





during a period of depressed rice prices, and through the efforts of Elizà Lucas the potentialities of indigo were finally realized.<sup>11</sup> In 1746 five thousand pounds were exported from Charlestown, and by 1772 this figure had risen to 230,000 pounds.<sup>12</sup> Rice, however, maintained its reputation as the leading money crop, for during 1772, 15,500 tierces<sup>13</sup> were exported to foreign and domestic ports.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of the economic advantages offered in any community, whether a stranger is attracted to its environs depends to a great extent on the attitude of its citizens. According to Pelatiah Webster, a New England visitor during 1765, the people of Charlestown were "vastly affable and polite, quite free from pride, and a stranger may make himself very easy with them."<sup>15</sup>

While he was waiting for the "Surprise" to receive her cargo, the opportunities and life of the city must have made an impression on the young sea captain's mind. And, as he

11. David Duncan Wallace, The History of South Carolina (New York, 1934), I, 89, 383-86.

12. S. C. Gazette, December 24, 1772.

13. A tierce is a cask which is larger than a barrel and smaller than a hogshead. It holds 42 wine gallons, or one third of a pipe.

14. S. G. Gazette, December 24, 1772.

15. Journal Of A Voyage to Charleston In So. Carolina By Pelatiah Webster In 1765 (Charleston, 1898), 7. In the Pamphlet Collection of the Charleston Library Society.





weighed anchor for Cowes on March 7, 1765,<sup>16</sup> he probably had decided to return and settle at Charlestown.

During the next year Captain Gillon was made master of the brig. "Free Mason" and made several trips to Charleston from foreign ports. On March 11, 1766,<sup>17</sup> he arrived in the harbor after a trip from New Castle. He remained only long enough to unload and take on a new cargo; and on April 8<sup>th</sup>, set sail for Cowes.<sup>18</sup>

In May of 1766 Captain Gillon again headed for Charleston on what proved to be one of the most significant voyages of his life. A passenger on board his ship was Mrs. Mary Cripps, a wealthy widow from England, accompanied by her son, John. During the passage the Captain was attracted to Mrs. Cripps and soon after their arrival at Charleston<sup>w</sup> they were married.<sup>19</sup>

Only two weeks after the wedding bells rang, Captain Gillon once again put to sea in the "Free Mason".<sup>20</sup>

16. S. C. Gazette, March 9, 1765.

17. Ibid., June 2, 1766.

18. The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal (Charlestown, S. C.), April 15, 1766.

19. Joseph Johnson, Traditions and Reminiscences Chiefly of the American Revolution in The South (Charleston, 1851) 133.

The marriage license was granted July 5, 1766. "Register of Marriage Licenses Granted December, 1765 to Aug., 1766," S.C.H.G.M. XXII (January, 1921), 37. They were married on July 6, 1766. S. C. Gazette, July 14, 1766.

20. S. C. Gazette, July 21, 1766.



During the next eight months he made several trips to and from Cowes; arriving in Charlestown<sup>W</sup> from his last cruise to that port on March 28, 1767.<sup>21</sup>

An advertisement in the Gazette of April 27, 1767, announced Gillon's next venture: "Alexander Gillon, Having purchased Mr. John Logan's Stock of Goods, Consisting of such articles as are usually imported, will sell the same very cheap, at the store lately possessed by said Mr. Logan, in Broad Street."<sup>22</sup>

Using his experience and business connections in Holland and England to good advantage, Gillon soon built a thriving business which increased with the expanding economy. By the fall of 1768, his advertisements listed over 150 different articles ranging from "Flanders bed ticking" to "rum".<sup>23</sup>

In December of 1768, returning from Scilly<sup>24</sup> where he had taken the ship "Peter and Ann", Captain Gillon ran into a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico. The winds were of such terrific force that by the time he reached the safety of Charlestown harbor only the ship's fore-mast was standing,

21. Ibid., March 30, 1767.

22. Ibid., April 27, 1767.

23. Ibid., September 26, 1768; October 3.

24. Islands off the Southwest coast of Cornwall, England.





the mizen and main masts being carried away. While attempting to save the ship, the mate and two seamen were washed overboard.<sup>25</sup>

In the summer of 1769 Charlestown citizens were discussing ways and means to halt the arbitrary trade restrictions imposed by the mother country. By fall of that year an organization known as the "Liberty Tree Committee" had drawn up a number of non-importation agreements which the local merchants were urged to sign. Many of them, like Gillon, had ordered goods from restricted regions before the agreements had become effective. When Gillon's ship loaded with merchandise arrived, and he refused to store or reship the goods, he was ordered to appear under the "Liberty Tree" to explain his actions. As this was the first test case tried under the "Tree" it was reported in detail by the Gazette of February 1, 1770:

"At a very numerous and respectable General Meeting of the Inhabitants, at Liberty Tree, after the election of Christopher Gadsden as Chairman Mr. Neufville, Chairman of the General Committee laid before those present the case of Alexander Gillon -

First that Mr. Alexander Gillon, had imported 100 Pipes of Wine, in the Ship Peter and Ann, from Teneriff; that these Wines did not arrive here till the 19th Ult: That therefore the Committee had required him to store or reship the same; But, that he had declined so doing, choosing to submit the consideration of some particular Hardships, to this general Meeting - This Matter being thus opened, Mr. Gillon, who attended, was called upon

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25. S. C. Gazette, December 29, 1768.



to give his Reasons for declining an immediate Compliance with the said Requisition. He alleged, That the Wines in Question had been ordered in May last, at least two Months before the Resolutions were entered into; that they had been purchased before the arrival of the Ship at Teneriff; that but for the long Detention of the Vessel, by Contrary Winds, before she sailed for, and at, Teneriff, and an unusual long Passage from thence, those Wines might have been here in all November; that therefore, and also on account of some other particular Hardships in his Case, which he set forth, he flattered himself, upon a due Consideration of every Circumstance it would be the Opinion of this Meeting, that he might sell the Wines here, without being culpable of infringing or acting Contrary to the Resolution. Mr. Gillon was heard with great attention. And when the matter had been fully discussed, the Question was put, 'Whether (considering the particular Circumstances of his case) 'he might be allowed to sell the same Wines here?' Those who should be of the Opinion were desired to declare it by the holding up of Hands: But, everyone considering that no Deviation whatever from the Resolutions should be countenanced, or connived at, not a single Hand was held up. Mr. Gillon was then required to, and did, sign an Agreement, as every other Subscriber had done, to whom Goods had come, not allowed by the Resolutions engaging to store the same, 'till a general Importation shall take Place, or to reship them." 26

Whether Gillon's appearance under the "Liberty Tree" had anything to do with his next move is questionable, but on March 15, 1770 he began liquidating his business preparatory to a trip abroad. On that date advertisements of special sales at his store on Broad Street began appearing in the Gazette and they continued intermittently until March 21, 1771. On this date he began "Selling off...(For Cash) His Remaining Stock of Goods at First Cost."<sup>27</sup>

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26. Ibid., February 1, 1770.

27. Ibid., March 21, 1771; March 28; April 4; April 11; May 2; May 9.





At the same time he threatened to sue anyone indebted to him after April 1, of that year, as he was leaving the Province for Europe in June.<sup>28</sup> However, it was not until the middle of August that he and his family "embarked and sailed for England."<sup>29</sup>

While he was in London, Gillon entered into a partnership with Peter Hasenclever, and together they sent to Charlestown a quantity of dry goods in the ship "Beaufair," commanded by Captain Alexander Curling.<sup>30</sup> This partnership obviously existed <sup>only</sup> for that one shipment, for mention of it ceased to appear in the papers.

When Gillon returned from England in May, 1772<sup>31</sup> he found the Colony enjoying an ever increasing prosperity which was to reach its pre-revolutionary peak in 1774.<sup>32</sup>

In this atmosphere of economic well being, Gillon's business interests multiplied and prospered. Advertisements in the fall and winter of 1772 show an ever increasing in-

28. Ibid., See footnote 27.

29. Ibid., August 22, 1771.

30. Ibid., November 28, 1771.

31. The Gillon family arrived from England on May 4, 1772. S. C. Gazette, May 7, 1772.

32. Indicative of this prosperity was the increase in the importation of slaves. From 1753 to 1773, 43,965 had been imported into Charlestown. During a period of less than two months in 1773, more than 3,800 had entered the port. S. C. Gazette, June 28, 1773.



ventory of goods imported from Holland, Germany, and England.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time he began to invest in real estate and by the outbreak of the revolution he had acquired property valued at 30,000 pounds sterling. According to his own estimation he was "equal to any merchant in the city in trade, credit, and correspondence, or perhaps on the continent."<sup>34</sup>

Some of his holdings were as follows:

1. A home and lot on the Bay with a one hundred foot front extending on the Cooper River, and a lot on the water running parallel to the river channel.
2. A dock of 105 feet fronting on the Cooper River Contiguous to the Exchange. <sup>35</sup>
3. Fifteen lots fronting on Meeting St., Hasell St., and King St.
4. Fifty-five hundred acres of land on the Congaree River in the Center of the State; one thousand of which was swamp. <sup>36</sup>

In January of 1773 he formed the firm of Alexander Gillon & Co., with his two stepsons, John-Splatt and William

33. Ibid., October 22, 1772; October 29; November 29; December 10; December 17.

34. Gazette of the State of South Carolina (Charleston, S. C.), September 9, 1784.

35. A part of this area North of the old exchange building is now a small cobblestone street running from East Bay to the Cooper River. It is called "Gillon Street" in honor of Alexander Gillon.

36. State Gazette, September 9, 1784.





Cripps, and a man named Florian-Charles Mey.<sup>37</sup>

During the summer and fall of 1773 Gillon and his wife traveled in the Northern Colonies.<sup>38</sup> They returned to Charlestown in November.<sup>39</sup>

Soon after his arrival Gillon participated in the formation of an organization which has been extremely important to the economic growth of the city. Gathering at "Mrs. Swallow's Tavern" on the night of December 9, 1773, Gillon<sup>40</sup> and other "Gentlemen in Trade" met and "proposed that a Chamber of Commerce be formed."<sup>41</sup> The organization thus created was the second one of its kind in the country.<sup>42</sup>

On January 1, 1774, the Alexander Gillon Co. was re-organized.<sup>43</sup> John-Splatt Cripps and Florian-Charles Mey began a co-partnership under the firm of "Mey and Cripps" and bought all of the Gillon Co.'s stock and dry goods.<sup>44</sup>

37. S. C. Gazette, January 7, 1773.

38. Ibid., June 7, 1773; July 19, 1773.

39. Ibid., November 15, 1773.

40. Alexander Gillon is listed in the Charleston Chamber of Commerce as being one of the first seventy members of the organization.

41. S. C. Gazette, December 13, 1773.

42. According to information received from the Charleston Chamber of Commerce.

43. S. C. Gazette, February 21, 1774; February 28.

44. Ibid., March 14, 1774; March 21; March 28.



Mey and Cripps took over the store on Broad Street, and Gillon and William Cripps moved to a new location on the Bay, where they began to specialize in foodstuffs and wines.<sup>45</sup>

Late in August of 1774, Gillon embarked for Rhode Island, and did not return until December 10<sup>th</sup>.<sup>46</sup>

Late in 1775 as tension began to mount between the mother country and her colonies, Gillon negotiated a contract with the Continental Congress whereby he was to procure powder, cannon, and other material in Europe for the army and navy.<sup>47</sup> Writing after the war Gillon claimed that the agreement "was ended as much to the advantage of the United States as any that Congress had ever entered into of that nature."<sup>48</sup>

45. Ibid., July 4, 1774; July 11; July 25; September 12.

46. Ibid., December 12, 1774.

47. Mention of this contract does not appear in the published Journals of the Continental Congress. However, in November of 1775, Robert Morris was appointed Chairman of a secret committee with power to contract for the importation of war material for the armed services. It is possible that Gillon negotiated his contract through this committee.

See, Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, Robert Morris, Patriot And Financier (New York, 1903), 18.

48. State Gazette, September 9, 1784.

In a letter to Henry Laurens, President of the Council of Safety, on March 11, 1776, Gillon requested that a convoy be provided for two of his vessels which were on their way to Europe laden with valuable cargo. Laurens complied with the petition and sent the brig. "Comet" and schooner "Defence" to take the two vessels under convoy "to the edge of Soundings." See, 'Henry Laurens to Captain Alexander Gillon,' March 15, 1776, in "Second Council of Safety of the Revolutionary Party." S.C.H.G.M., IV (July, 1903), 201-202.

The vessels mentioned here were probably the two that Gillon claimed returned to Charlestown later with everything on board that he had sent them for. See, State Gazette, September 9, 1784.





A manifestation of Gillon's growing reputation in the community was his election in November of 1775 as a representative from St. Michael's Parish to the Provincial Congress.<sup>49</sup> As a result of this election he became a member of the first General Assembly in Charlestown. The Assembly came into being on March 26, 1776 when the Provincial Congress ended and resolved itself into the Assembly.

In June 1776, when the British were making an unsuccessful attempt to take Charlestown, Gillon was in Philadelphia working out the details of his war contract. When he heard the news - sick at the time though he was - he immediately offered his services to Congress as a naval officer. His plan was to gather several war vessels, and by attacking unexpectedly he thought he could capture many of the British transports. A lack of available ships prevented the acceptance of the proposal.<sup>50</sup>

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49. S. C. Gazette, November 14, 1775.

On February 1, 1775 Gillon was elected president of the "German Friendly Society". From this society he helped organize a military company called the "German Fusiliers" which was called into service at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. He served as a captain in the company from May, 1775 until the end of 1777. See, George J. Gongaware, The History of the German Friendly Society of Charleston South Carolina 1776-1916 (Richmond, 1935), II, ii. Also D. E. Huger Smith, "Com. Gillon and the Frigate South Carolina," S.C.H.G.M., IX (October, 1908), 190.

50. State Gazette, September 9, 1784.



When Gillon completed the contract with Congress he returned to Charlestown and dissolved his business.<sup>51</sup>

In the fall of 1777 he wrote Henry Laurens, then President of Congress, asking him to consider the idea of his going to Holland to induce his countrymen "to become bold adventurers this way in trade and perhaps negotiate a Loan that may prove convenient."<sup>52</sup>

On November 20, 1777, a letter Gillon wrote to Congress proposing a similar scheme was referred to the Committee of Commerce.<sup>53</sup> This Committee gave the following report to Congress on November 28, 1777:

"This Committee of Commerce....have conferred with Mr. Gillon on the subject, and are of opinion, that a sum of money not exceeding 250,000 dollars should be advanced to the said Alexander Gillon, Esq<sup>r</sup> or his attorneys, annually for three years ...the said advances to be made by this Committee, or such other as may hereafter be appointed to superintend the continental commerce, in such sums and at such periods as may be necessary for accomplishing purchases of suitable produce or other articles to be remitted to Europe:

That the said Alexander Gillon, Esq. or his attorneys, shall purchase all the remittances they make and charter or purchase ships suitable for transporting the same to Europe, on the best and most frugal terms in their power..  
...:

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51. Ibid., May 5, 1777; May 12; May 19.

52. Gillon to Laurens, (no date), in Laurens MSS. (South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, S. C.), Also in "Letters from Commodore Alexander Gillon in 1778-1779," S.C.H.G.M., X, (January, 1909), 1.

53. Worthington Chauncey<sup>Ford</sup> (ed.) Journals of the Continental Congress 1774-1789 (Washington, 1907), IX, 944.





That the said Alexander Gillon shall forthwith repair to Europe, and purchase...such cloathing, arms, ammunition, and other articles, as may, from time to time, be directed by the said committee, or board of commerce, to the amount of the net proceeds of all the remittances he or his attorneys in Europe shall there receive from his attorneys in America, such articles to be bought on the best terms, and shipped for these United States, in such ships, or by such conveyances, as may be most likely to arrive safe:

....:

That the customary mercantile commissions be allowed for purchasing and making the remittances, and on the sale thereof in Europe, and a commission of five per cent on the purchase and exportation of all the articles ordered from Europe, the said commissions to be the only compensation or benefit the said Alexander Gillon, or his attorneys, are to receive or derive to themselves from this business..... 54

According to Gillon this contract would have netted him 7,000 pounds sterling a year "free of every risque and danger."<sup>55</sup> However, there was some opposition to the acceptance of this contract because Gillon had not gone to Europe personally to conduct the business of his previous one, but had sent his agent instead.<sup>56</sup> Answering this charge Gillon retorted that he had suffered from an "attack of a complaint" which would have made it "certain death to go to sea."<sup>57</sup>

Approximately two months after Congress agreed to the terms of his war contract the South Carolina Assembly made

54. Ibid., IX, 978-979.

55. State Gazette, September 9, 1784.

56. Henry Laurens to Gillon, May 4, 1778, in Laurens MSS.

57. Gillon to Laurens, June 25, 1778, in Laurens MSS.



an appointment that would completely change the direction of Alexander Gillon's life and would launch him on a turbulent Revolutionary War career.

On September 12, 1776, the South Carolina General Assembly had designated a committee to prepare a bill for appointing commissioners to superintend and direct the naval affairs of the state.<sup>58</sup> The Committee reported on September 27, and on October 1, balloting took place in the House for commissioners to superintend and direct the State's naval program. Edward Blake, Thomas Savage, Josiah Smith, Jr., Thomas Corbett, Roger Smith, George Abbott Hall, and Thomas Shubrick, were duly elected.

In February of 1778 Alexander Gillon was appointed Commodore of the South Carolina Navy to carry into effect the plans of the Naval Commissioners.<sup>59</sup> He immediately wrote Congress asking if his contract might be abrogated in view of his new commission. This was accomplished by a resolution in Congress on March 31, 1778: Resolved, "That as Mr. Gillon hath accepted of an appointment to command the navy of the State of South Carolina, and Congress have empowered their commissioner at Paris to appoint agents to transact the

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58. A. S. Salley, Jr., (ed.), Journal of the Commissioners of the Navy of South Carolina 1776-1779 (Columbia, 1912), I, 3.

59. The South Carolina and American General Gazette (Charlestown, S. C.), February 26, 1778.





commercial affairs of these states, it is inexpedient to proceed upon his contract."<sup>60</sup>

At the same time that Gillon was appointed Commodore, John Joyner, William Robertson, and John McQueen, were elected "Captains of Frigates."<sup>61</sup>

On March 26, 1778, the state enlarged its naval plans by ordering that indigo and rice worth \$500,000 be bought and shipped to Europe. The proceeds of their sale were to be used to purchase three frigates.<sup>62</sup> Commodore Gillon and his three captains were then ordered to Europe to supervise the selling of the State's produce and the buying of the vessels. For fear that some of the goods sent from Charlestown would be captured on route, and the loss on the sale in Europe would reduce the proceeds below the sum wanted, Gillon was furnished credentials to enable him to negotiate to a loan on the faith and credit of the State in order "to make up any deficiency that may happen in the Sum granted."<sup>63</sup>

Opposition to this plan was voiced by the French minister Gerard who wrote Henry Laurens that "this step executed by a

60. Journals of Continental Congress, X, 298.

61. S. C. and American Gen. Gazette, February 26, 1778.

62. David Duncan Wallace, The History of South Carolina (New York, 1934), II, 179.

63. Rawlins Lowndes to Benjamin Franklin, July 18, 1778, Franklin MSS. (In American Philosophical Society Library, Philadelphia), X, 132.



single State in contradiction with the plan of Confederation, could hurt in Europe the Idea of the uniformity of the Governments to rely on Congress for the exertion of the Common forces and it might ... prejudice ... the consideration Congress has so justly acquired."<sup>64</sup> Subsequent events were to prove that Monsieur Gerard was justified in his apprehension.

While waiting to embark for Europe on his mission Commodore Gillon took part in a naval engagement off the Carolina coast which further enhanced his reputation as an experienced and courageous seaman. Details of this venture were given in the State Gazette.

"Last Friday morning sailed upon a cruize the Connecticut state ship Defence, commanded by Samuel Smedly, Esq.; and the sloop Volant, commanded by Capt. Oliver Daniel, and before night took two privateer sloops fitted out from St. Augustine, viz. the Governor Tonym's Revenge, of 12 Carriage guns and 72 men, commanded by Capt. Peter Bachop; and the Ranger of 8 guns and 31 men, Capt. Osborn Commander; who were both brought into port the next day.... It reflects particular honour on Capt. Smedly, that immediately upon His Excellency the President's application to that gentleman, he had his ship prepared and ready for sea by Wednesday evening.... Capt. Daniel's vessel was unloaded, manned with volunteers and proceeded to the Road on Tuesday night; and the service was greatly forwarded by the animated exertions of Commodore Gil-

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64. Edmund Burnett, Letters of Members of the Continental Congress. (Washington, 1926), III, 441.





lon, who, with Capt. Robinson, and Capt. M'Queen afterwards went volunteers in the ship." 65

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65. State Gazette, June 24, 1778. Gillon alludes to this venture in his open letter to Christopher Gadsden in the same paper issued on September 9, 1784. "Ask your friend... if I did not in 1778, project and execute the plan of bringing in more guns, and more men in forty-eight hours time, than we had on board of the vessels we went to sea with, and that at a time when our coast was beset with British men of war and privateers, and when in the very act of capturing, there was some danger."

Dr. Joseph Johnson gives a very dramatic and inaccurate account of Gillon's contribution to the capture of the vessels. He claims he got his story from "a gentleman who was in Charlestown at the time of the exploit," Traditions and Reminiscences, 127-129.



## CHAPTER II

### EUROPEAN MISSION

On July 23, 1778,<sup>1</sup> Commodore Gillon, accompanied by Captains Robertson and McQueen,<sup>2</sup> boarded the brig. "Notre Dame" commanded by Captain William Hall. The next day the "Notre Dame," escorted by the "Oliver Cromwell," commanded by Captain Parker, and two sloops, set sail for Havana.<sup>3</sup> This was to be the Commodore's first stop on his way to Europe.

While sailing to Havana several interesting happenings occurred to the small armada, which were recorded in Boardman's Log-Book. On August 6... "At half after six afternoon Saw a Sail and Gave Chace, at 11 Gave her a Bow Gun which

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1. Log-Book of Timothy Boardman (Albany, 1885), 63, in Pamphlet Collection of Charleston Library Society.

Timothy Boardman was one of the pioneer settlers of Rutland, Vermont. His Journal was written on board the privateer "Oliver Cromwell" during two cruises. This pamphlet contains the journal of the second cruise made in 1778 from New London, Connecticut to Charlestown, South Carolina.

2. Captain Joyner had left for Europe several months earlier.

3. Boardman's Log-Book, 63.





brought her too She was a Brig. from New Orleans in Mississippi Bound to Cape Francois ... her cargo was Furr & Lumber She had some Englishmen on Board the Occasion of our Detaining her So Long."<sup>4</sup> A "Great Turtle" was caught on August 11th and "Kook<sup>d</sup> the Next Day for the Entertainment of the Gentlemen of the Fleet No Less than 13 Came on Board to Dine."<sup>5</sup>

At daybreak on August 14, just as they were crossing into the Gulf of Mexico, the "Oliver Cromwell" announced her departure from the small fleet by firing 13 guns as a farewell salute. As she came about and headed back towards New London she was sent on her way by answering salvos from the 16 guns on the "Notre Dame" and the 22 on the two sloops.<sup>6</sup>

The "Notre Dame" arrived in Havana harbor on August 30, 1778. For reasons that Gillon did not reveal officials in Havana were reluctant to allow his party ashore, but finally acquiesced when they agreed to be accompanied by an adjutant from the staff of the Cuban Governor.<sup>7</sup>

On September 18 Gillon wrote Henry Laurens that the "Notre Dame" was returning to Charlestown immediately<sup>8</sup> and

4. Boardman's Log-Book, 63.

5. Ibid., 63.

6. Ibid., 64.

7. Gillon to Henry Laurens, September 18, 1778. Laurens MSS., "Gillon's Letters", S.C.H.G.M., X, (April, 1909), 75-76.

8. The "Notre Dame" returned to Charlestown in early October of 1778. State Gazette, October 14, 1778.



he was planning to pursue his voyage in another vessel. He also wanted Laurens to entertain the idea of using Havana as a refitting and stopping off place for Continental vessels.<sup>9</sup> At a later date he wrote than an agent should be

appointed there to transact American business. For the position he recommended the Governor's Adjutant, Ralph de

Luis.<sup>10</sup> Research has not revealed whether this proposal was ever accepted.

Gillon left Havana on October 24 as a passenger on the ship "Medly". In a letter to Henry Laurens he describes the storm which caused a return to port.

"A few hours after we was out a Gale of Wind commenced that lasted 7 days and prevented hoisting any boat out to visit our neighbors our vessel suffered much partY when we was on the 29th within a few minutes of being shipwreck'd in the height of this Gale which forc'd us to cut away our main topmast and all thereto belonging to [heave] 6 of our Guns overboard to clear the decks to try to get in here but we could not thus was kept out till the 3<sup>d</sup> Instant [Nov. 3, 1778] when we return'd almost a wreck." <sup>11</sup>

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9. Gillon to Laurens, November 16, 1778.

10. Gillon to Laurens, November 16, 1778. Laurens MSS., "Gillon's Letters", S.C.H.G.M., X, (April, 1909), 77-79.

11. Ibid., November 16, 1778.





The Commodore set off again on November 17<sup>12</sup> determined to "ramsack every corner in Europe"<sup>13</sup> in pursuit of his business. On January 19 he fell in with a Spanish fleet commanded by Count de Grasse. The Count ordered Captain Marigny of the frigate "Fortunee," to take Commodore Gillon to Brest.<sup>14</sup> He arrived there on January 25, 1779.<sup>15</sup>

Captain Joyner, who had left for Europe several months prior to the Commodore, had arrived at Nantes in August. Other members of the Commodore's staff, Mr. Lindwaith, Mr. Mayrant, Mr. Coram, and Captain Robertson, reached France on December 31, 1778 in the ship "Snow Gustave."<sup>16</sup>

On the day of his arrival at Brest, Gillon penned a letter to the United States Commissioners at Paris relating the experiences of his trans-Atlantic crossing, and expressing his anxiousness to deliver to them personally his official authorization from Rawlins Lowndes,<sup>17</sup> and two letters of introduc-

12. Gillon to Henry Laurens, March 5, 1779. Laurens MSS., "Gillon's Letters," S.C.H.G.M., X (April, 1909), 78-82.

13. Gillon to Laurens, November 16, 1778.

14. Alexander Gillon to the United States Commissioners, January 25, 1779, in Franklin MSS., (American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia) XIII, 64.

15. Gillon to Laurens, March 5, 1779.

16. Ibid., March 5, 1779.

17. Rawlins Lowndes to Franklin, July 18, 1778, in Franklin MSS., X, 132.



tion from Arthur Middleton<sup>18</sup> and Christopher Gadsden.<sup>19</sup>

From Brest the Commodore traveled to Nantes where he arrived with his secretary on March 4. There he found 130 casks of South Carolina indigo, and arranged to sell them "on the same terms as they gave their friends on their own islands."<sup>20</sup>

About this time Gillon received an important letter from Rawlins Lowndes which must be taken into consideration in any appraisal of subsequent events in his European involvements. In this letter dated January 31, 1779, Lowndes wrote: "We have the most unbounded confidence in your Prudence and good management....whatever you shall find necessary and conducive to the public good, in respect to issuing commissions, advancing pay or any other matter which shall appear to you proper to be done...will be confirmed and established in the fullest extention."<sup>21</sup> Gillon was also au-

18. Arthur Middleton to Franklin, July 4, 1778, in I. Minis Hays (ed.) Calendar of the Papers of Benjamin Franklin in the Library of the American Philosophical Society (Philadelphia, 1908), I, 453.

19. Ibid., Christopher Gadsden to Franklin, July 15, 1778.

20. Gillon to South Carolina Delegates in the Continental Congress at Philadelphia, March 5, 1779, "Gillon's Letters", S.C.H.G.M., X (April, 1909), 79-82.

21. Journals of the House of Representatives of the State South Carolina, 1783 (in South Carolina Historical Commission, Columbia, S. C.), 281.





thorized to borrow 15,000 pounds sterling on state's account.<sup>22</sup>

Leaving Nantes Gillon continued on his way to Paris. By this time the news of the British invasion of Georgia had reached France; and, because of this pessimistic turn of events, and the failure of certain mercantile houses in Paris and Bordeaux, the French government became very apprehensive about granting requests for loans and ships. With this resistance mounting, Gillon<sup>was</sup> still in hopes that the French government would act favorably on his plan to buy three frigates already fitted out and manned. If he received a negative answer he was planning to accept an invitation from friends in Holland, and approach the Dutch government with the same proposal.<sup>23</sup>

The Commodore found that his efforts were futile in Paris and, writing to Franklin on April 22, 1779, he asked for a pass so that he and Captain Joyner with their servants could travel through Flanders to Holland. He ended the letter with the first of many appeals to Franklin to intervene on his behalf with the French Naval Ministry:

"America in General, as well as So. Carolina will be much indebted to your Excellency if you'll be pleas'd to Second my application to his Excellency M. de Sartine,

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22. Ibid., 281.

23. Gillon to South Carolina Delegates in the Continental Congress, March 5, 1779.



for either selling me ye three Frigates wanted, lending me ye Money on that States Security to Build them, or if that does not suit then for this Government to join in ye Security for ye Sum wanted..." 24

Franklin, who had been commissioned by the Continental Congress to negotiate loans and solicit favors from the governments of Europe for the United States, was naturally reluctant to cooperate with the pet schemes of representatives sent from each of the individual states. Gillon encountered resistance from Franklin for that reason, and also because he used no tact in his presentation of his plans. This uncompromising attitude on the part of Gillon caused a mounting antagonism from Franklin which culminated in a personal feud between the two.

Even though opposition from Franklin was becoming more and more pronounced, Commodore Gillon did make several contacts in Paris with influential men who were to stand by him as his business became deeper and deeper involved in a mire of complications. One of these men was Ralph Izard<sup>25</sup> who, at that time, wrote the South Carolina Delegates in Congress:

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24. Gillon to Franklin, April 21, 1779, in Franklin MSS., XIV, 52.

25. The others were Arthur Lee and John Adams.





"Commodore Gillon has done, and is still doing everything in his power to accomplish the objects of his commission....The State of South Carolina could not, I think, have chosen a fitter person for this business, than the Commodore." 26

When Gillon returned to Paris in May of 1779 from his trip to Holland<sup>27</sup> he continued his efforts to make Franklin and de Sartine<sup>28</sup> acquiesce to one of his three plans to raise a navy for the State of South Carolina. The plans were as follows:

- 1) For France to lend him the money the State of South Carolina had authorized him to borrow.
- 2) For France to join him in the security the State had given if the money was to be procured in any other place.
- 3) For France to sell him three frigates ready and fitted for sea. They were to be paid for in two to five years with interest, or, payable in South Carolina produce. 29

Gillon also presented a plan for an expedition against Georgia that would relieve the hard pressed Continental forces there. His idea was to send three frigates of the line,

26. Ralph Izard to South Carolina Delegates in Congress, April 26, 1779 "Izard-Laurens Correspondence", S.C.H.G.M.;XXII (July, 1921), 80-81.

27. According to Joseph Johnson, when Gillon returned to Holland he was held in high esteem by his fellow countrymen. To impress them with his wealth, the Commodore rode around in expensive equipage and mingled with royalty and nobility. Johnson's Memoirs, 135.

28. The French Naval Minister.

29. Gillon to South Carolina Delegates in Congress, June 15, 1779, in "Gillon's Letters," S.C.H.G.M., X (July, 1909) 131-135.



two cutters, and six row galleys to Georgia. He and his officers would accompany this fleet providing that de Sartine would agree to allow the State of South Carolina to retain all the stores and ammunition that the vessels carried. This plan was also objected to and prompted Gillon to write South Carolina's congressional delegates that he felt that the people in France were "predetermined not to help us & when those whom America has appointed to support her requests & are averse to ye measure itself it avails little to have ye aid of such gentlemen as Mess. Adams, Lee & Izard whose assistance had they been in power would've procured I should suppose at least a something."<sup>30</sup>

On June 29, 1779, the Commodore wrote another letter to Franklin outlining his plan for "ye Relief of ye Bleeding Inhabitants of So. Carolina." In this letter he informed Franklin that he was writing as "Ye Superior Naval American Officer in Europe."<sup>31</sup> This was the first inkling of the mounting antagonism between Gillon and John Paul Jones which was later to cause unpleasant complications for both men.

Captain Jones at that time was gathering a fleet together at L'Orient, France, preparatory to a cruise around England. Gillon, who was only interested in going to the

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30. Ibid., June 15, 1779.

31. Gillon to Franklin, June 29, 1779, in Franklin MSS.; XIV, 221.





relief of Carolina and Georgia, resented the fact that Franklin paid no attention to his plan for utilizing Jones' squadron in his scheme to aid the two colonies.<sup>32</sup> In the spring of 1779 Gillon had written a letter to John Jay questioning the procedure of attaching the American ship "Alliance" to "an Amphibious Squadron of french Cruisers, subjecting them to Orders of Captain Paul Jones and giving Continental Commissions to a Number of frenchmen..."<sup>33</sup> This precipitated a letter from Samuel Adams to James Lovell<sup>34</sup> on March 30, 1779 recommending that an investigation be made of the status of Jones' squadron.<sup>35</sup> However, before any investigation took place the squadron left L'Orient. The details of the voyage, and its relation to Commodore Gillon's European mission will be dealt with later.

Replying to Gillon's letter of June 29, 1779, Franklin wrote that he had no authority to direct the operation of Jones' squadron as it was not fitted out at the expense of the United States. He claimed that he had lent the "Alliance" to it in the hopes that she would be more beneficial to the

32. Ibid., June 29, 1779.

33. Harry A. Cushing (ed.) The Writings of Samuel Adams, (New York, 1908), IV, 145.

34. James Lovell was a delegate to the Continental Congress from Massachusetts, and an active member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, D.A.B., XI, 438-439.

~~35. Ibid., 145.~~

35. CUSHING, WRITINGS OF ADAMS, IV, 145.



common cause attached to a fleet than she could be alone. Regarding the Commodore's other scheme for raising 1,800,000 livres in France by subscription, Franklin refused to cooperate on the grounds that he was attempting to procure a loan for the United States at a lower rate of interest. "And, I can not but observe that the agents from our different States running all over Europe begging to borrow money at high interest has given such an idea of our poverty and distress as has exceedingly hurt the general credit..."<sup>36</sup>

In July of 1779 Commodore Gillon was involved in the trial of Franklin's nephew Jonathan Williams, an official at Nantes.<sup>37</sup> Williams was accused by Arthur Lee of trying to supercede all the other officials at Nantes, and of appropriating for his own use 100,000 livres of government money.<sup>38</sup> At the insistence of Lee a committee was formed to review the case. Gillon became a member of this committee when, for some reason, a merchant named John Daniel Schweighauser<sup>39</sup> could not attend the meeting. At the trial Lee could not substantiate his charges and Williams was acquitted. However, the

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36. Franklin to Gillon, July 5, 1779. Francis Wharton, (ed.), The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, (Washington, 1889), III, 239-240.

37. Franklin to Jonathan Williams, July 8, 1779, in Albert Henry Smythe (ed.), The Writings of Benjamin Franklin (New York, 1906), VII, 363-364.

38. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (eds.), Dictionary of American Biography, (New York, 1936), XX, 281.

39. Jonathan Williams, Jr. to Franklin, July 2, 1779, in Hays, Calendar of Franklin Papers, II, 105.





accusations by Lee did not endear him to Franklin, and the animosity between the two continued to grow.<sup>40</sup>

In the meantime Gillon's bad luck in France had gotten back to the South Carolina delegates in Congress. Henry Laurens wrote to John Adams that "Commodore Gillon's ill success in France may possibly abate a little of his fervor for accomplishing everything by the force of his own powers.. ..I am sorry to hear that when he returns to Charleston<sup>W</sup>, he will be asked unpleasant questions respecting his general conduct, and Don Juan de Miralles complains heavily of one of his transactions at Havana."<sup>41</sup>

Undaunted by Franklin's rebuffs Gillon went to Frankfort on the Main in December of 1779,<sup>42</sup> and shortly after-

40. According to Edmund C. Burnett in 1777 Lee had suggested to Congress that he be appointed minister in France, and that Silas Deane and Franklin be sent to **less** important posts. Largely through Lee's accusation Deane was later dismissed from government service. Franklin had taken Deane's side in the controversy. This had further strained his relationships with Lee. See, D.A.B., IX, 96-98.

Franklin in a letter to William Carmichael called Lee "a restless genius [that] wherever he is, must either find or make a Quarrel." See, Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, III, 799.

Richard Henry Lee claims that Arthur Lee became very bitter against Franklin when he was not appointed minister plenipotentiary to Spain in 1779. Life of Arthur Lee (Boston, 1892), I, 153.

41. Henry Laurens to John Adams, October 4, 1779. In Charles Francis Adams (ed.), The Works of John Adams, (Boston, 1854), IX, 498.

42. Gillon to Franklin, December 1, 1779. Franklin MSS., XVI, 137. This letter was almost impossible to read, and information concerning his business in Frankfort could not be ascertained.



ward once again appeared in Holland. Establishing himself at Amsterdam, he tried to pass himself off as an Admiral, and as an agent of the United States government. C. G. Dumas, an American agent there, suspecting some intrigue wrote to Franklin inquiring as to whether the United States commissioned anyone to a rank higher than a Commodore.<sup>43</sup>

By March 1, 1780 Gillon evidently became convinced that with the lack of cooperation which he had encountered from the "fountain heads of every Court" it was futile to continue any further negotiations. On that date he wrote two letters: one to Samuel Huntington, President of Congress, the other to John Rutledge, head of the South Carolina government.<sup>44</sup> The second letter was captured en route by the British and used as the basis for a complaint against the Dutch government.<sup>45</sup>

In his letter to Huntington, Gillon attributed his inability to borrow money in Holland to the fact that his au-

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43. C. G. F. Dumas to Franklin, Feb. 3, 1780, Franklin MSS.; XXXIX, 145.

44. Gillon to Huntington, March 1, 1780, Laurens MSS.; Gillon to Rutledge, March 1, 1780. The Royal Gazette, (Charlestown, S. C.), May 2, 1781. The letter to Rutledge is also included in B. F. Stevens, Facsimiles of Manuscripts in European Archives Relating to America, 1773-1783, (London, 1895), X, 942.

45. Smith, "Gillon And the S. C. Navy", S.C.H.G.M., IX, 197.





thorization to negotiate a loan had not been backed by Congress~~and~~, that his power from South Carolina was too restricted and complicated to meet current circumstances. He explained that he found the Dutch much more sympathetic toward the American cause, and that he was then trying to purchase "the two best Ships, ... in the World."<sup>46</sup>

The Commodore's letter to Governor Rutledge expatiated on his difficulties in negotiating a loan and building the three frigates. He wrote that opposition from Franklin and other ministers had nullified his endeavors to purchase the two frigates mentioned above; and as a last resort he was determined to convert money into material for the desired frigates. His idea was to ship the material to the States via St. Eustatius<sup>47</sup> and have the frigates built at Philadelphia, Boston, or Portsmouth. The Commodore ended his letter to Rutledge on a melancholy note:

"I wish it had been my fate to have continued in America, as I would have cheerfully undergone any fatigue or danger, in preference to the begging plan, necessity by cruel disappointments compelled me to adopt." <sup>48</sup>

Ironically, the very day that Gillon was writing these letters the Chevalier Ann Paul Emanuel Sigismund de Montmor-

46. Gillon to Huntington, March 1, 1780. Laurens MSS.

47. An island in the West Indies owned by the Dutch.

48. Gillon to Rutledge, March 1, 1780, in Royal Gazette, May 2, 1781.



ency Luxembourg was petitioning the King of France for the use of the frigate "L'Indien";<sup>49</sup> a ship long sought after by the Commodore.<sup>50</sup> How Gillon learned about the transaction, and how he made the acquaintance of the Chevalier is still shrouded in mystery. Nevertheless, on May 30, 1780, the day that the King ceded the frigate to Luxembourg, he and Commodore Alexander Gillon signed a contract containing the following articles:

1. Luxembourg ceded the frigate "L'Indien" to Commodore Gillon for three years.
2. Gillon bound himself to get the ship out of Amsterdam in six weeks, out of the Texel in three months, and to maintain her.
3. Gillon was to command and to be replaced in case of sickness or death by an officer appointed by the State of South Carolina.
4. The ship was to cruise only against the enemies of France and the United States.
5. All prizes were to be sent to France, consigned to M. Grand, a banker in Paris.
6. Proceeds of prizes were to be divided in this manner: one half to crew, one quarter to the State, and one quarter to Luxembourg.
7. If ship was otherwise employed, indemnification was to be made to Luxembourg.

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<sup>49</sup>. Letter of Count De Choiseul, Consul of France to His Excellency the Governor, (Columbia, 1853), 9, in Pamphlet Collection of Charleston Library Society.

<sup>50</sup>. David Duncan Wallace, The History of South Carolina, (New York, 1934), II, 308.





8. Ship was to be returned at the end of three years to the port of L'Orient in France.
9. In the event of peace before the expiration of the three years, the frigate was to be returned to L'Orient at the expense of the state of South Carolina.
10. If the ship safely returned Luxembourg would be due one quarter of all the prizes and the sum of 100,000 livres. If the frigate was not returned at the appointed time, Luxembourg would receive one quarter of all prizes and the sum of 400,000 livres. At least 300,000 of this must be paid in specie.
11. Gillon pledged the public faith of the State of South Carolina; and all its property and revenues, as well as his own, for the payment of the said 300,000 livres.
12. Gillon pledged that this treaty should be ratified by the State of South Carolina within nine months. 51

The frigate "L'Indien" had been built in Holland for the American Navy in 1777 by the Chevalier de Louis Boux, a French naval architect.<sup>52</sup> Original plans were for the "Indien" to be under the command of John Paul Jones. However, by the time Jones reached France in 1778 the frigate was unavailable because British agents had discovered that she was being built for the American Navy. The Dutch to protect their neutrality had forced the American Naval Commissioners

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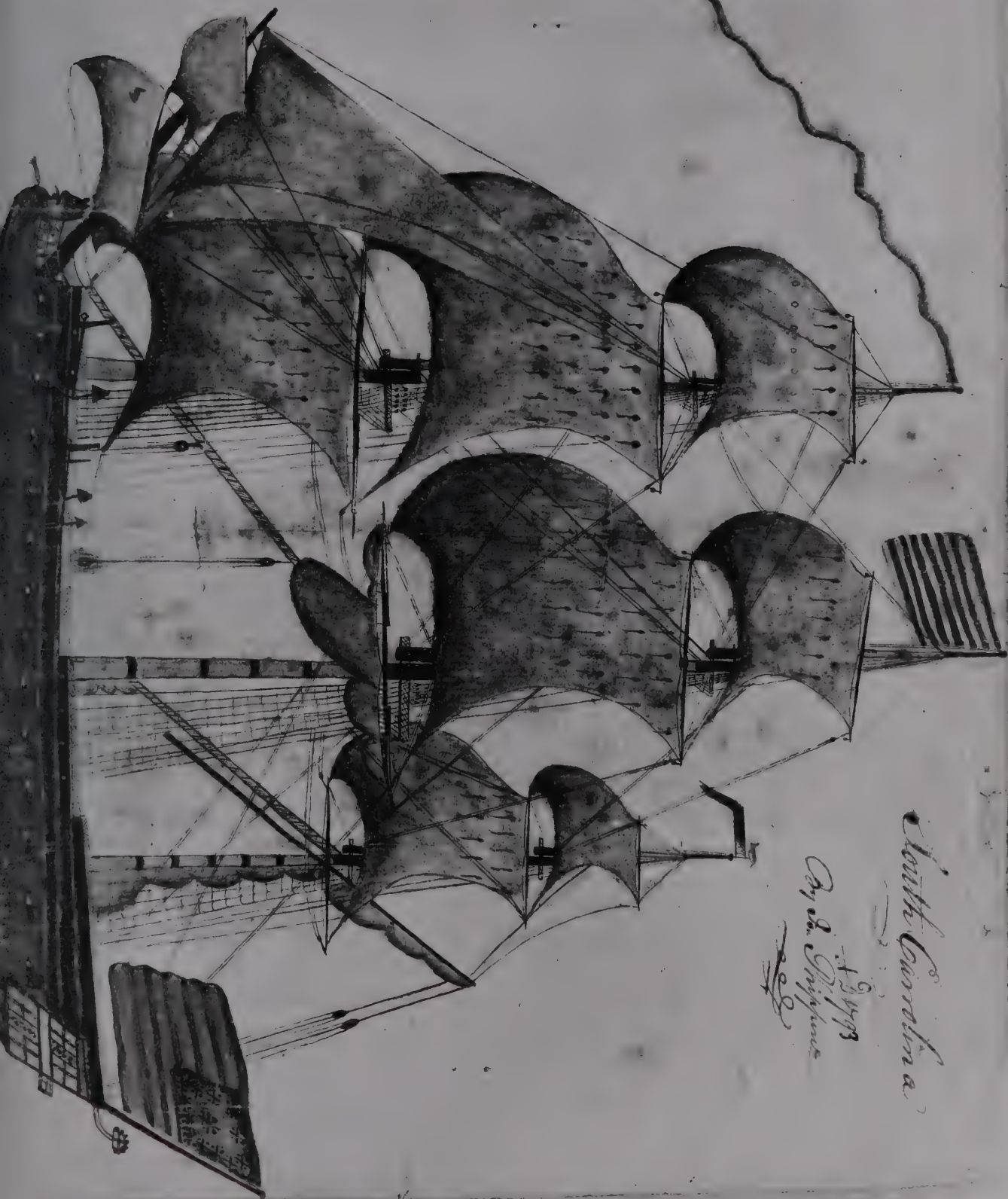
51. Louis F. Middlebrook, The Frigate of South Carolina, (Salem, 1929), 3-4.

52. Stevens, Facsimiles of American Manuscripts, II, 170.





The Frigate "South Carolina" painted in 1793 by John  
Prippin. This painting hangs in the Peabody Museum of Salem,  
Massachusetts.



*South Carolina*

1849  
By A. D. Phillips  
1849





to sell her to France.<sup>53</sup>

When Commodore Gillon took possession of the "Indien" he renamed her "the South Carolina".<sup>54</sup> She was a large war ship by Revolutionary War standards, drawing twenty-five feet of water,<sup>54</sup> and mounting 28 long 42 pounders on the main deck, and 16 long 12 pounders on forecastle and quarter decks. In addition she could accommodate 550 men.<sup>55</sup> Getting this ship in readiness for departure involved Gillon and the State of South Carolina in economic and military entanglements which were not settled until nearly seventy-five years after the close of the Revolutionary War. The first violent controversy was caused by the Commodore's efforts to solicit a crew

53. Middlebrook, Frigate South Carolina, 1.

How the British discovered the construction plan is controversial. Mrs. de Koven says that the British Ambassador Elliot at the Hague had discovered the ownership of the "Indien" from a chance sight of some papers lying on the desk of M. Dumas, secretly employed as American agent at the Dutch capital." The Life and Letters of John Paul Jones (New York, 1913), I, 244.

Another writer attributes the discovery to the duplicity of Arthur Lee's secretary who turned over to the British the plans for the frigate. Middlebrook, Frigate South Carolina, 1.

54. Stevens, Facsimiles of American Manuscripts, V, 493.

55. Middlebrook, Frigate South Carolina, 5. General William Mountrie claimed the "South Carolina" carried 28 Swedish 36 pounders on main deck, and 12 Swedish 12 pounders on forecastle and quarter deck. Memoirs of the American Revolution, (New York, 1802), II, 210.



in various French ports, and revolved around the figure of Captain Pierre Landais. The details of this controversy are so important to an understanding of subsequent events that a digression from the main theme, will, of necessity, have to be undertaken at this point.

Pierre Landais was supposedly an experienced French naval officer who had sailed around the world with the famous navigator Bougainville.<sup>56</sup> On the recommendation of Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane he was commissioned as a captain in the Continental Navy and sent to the States in command of the "Stammand". He arrived at Portsmouth on September 1, 1777, and began to petition the Navy Board for an assignment.<sup>57</sup>

In January, 1779 the 32 gun ship "Alliance" was ordered to France to convoy General LaFayette to France. Out of respect for the Marquis the command of the ship was given to Captain Landais. On the way over to France a mutiny was organized among the British seamen<sup>58</sup> on board. The mutiny

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56. Gardner W. Allen, A Naval History of the American Revolution, (New York, 1913), II, 371. According to Egar Stanton Maclay Landais' "eccentricities had prevented his employment in the French navy." A History of the United States Navy, (New York, 1894), I, 107.

57. Memorandum Concerning Captain Landais, (No date), Laurens MSS.

58. Because there was a scarcity of seamen the American naval authorities offered freedom to a group of shipwrecked British sailors if they would sail with the "Alliance" to France. Maclay, History of U. S. Navy, I, 95.





would have probably been successful if the plotters had not taken into their confidence an American seaman whom they thought was from Ireland and sympathetic towards their plans. He reported the whole scheme to his superiors and the mutinous crew members were apprehended before anything was done to disturb the passage of the ship.<sup>59</sup>

When the "Alliance" reached France, John Paul Jones, with Franklin's blessing, was assembling ships at L'Orient for his second expedition. Franklin, for reasons already mentioned, had attached the "Alliance" to Jones' fleet.

Jones' effort to purchase a ship from the French had finally met with success in January of 1779 when an East Indian, called the "Duc de Duras", was obtained. In honor of his benefactor, Franklin, the ship was renamed the "Bonhomme Richard". As commander of this ship, Jones was put in charge of the aforementioned fleet at L'Orient.

The expedition sailed from L'Orient on June 19, 1779, with friction mounting between Jones and Landais, who seemed to find it difficult to cooperate with either his "Superiors or inferiors."<sup>60</sup>

During the voyage of the squadron around the British Isles Landais' feeling of bitterness and jealousy towards Jones manifested itself on several occasions. At times he disappeared entirely from the squadron. In September, against

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59. Ibid., 95-97.

60. Allen, Naval History of Revolution, II, 442-444.



Jones' order, Landais sent two war prizes to Bergen, Norway, where they were lost to the Americans. His actions reached a climax during the battle between the "Bonhomme Richard" and the "Serapis." Landais who had kept the "Alliance" at a safe distance during most of the engagement was accused of firing at the "Richard" during the last phase of the fighting. Shot holes found on the port side bore out the accusation, as this side had never been exposed to the guns of the "Serapis." According to the testimony of the officers in the squadron Landais admitted later that he would not have been displeased at the surrender of the "Bonhomme Richard," as, then, he would have had an opportunity to reap the full glory of the victory.<sup>61</sup>

When Jones reached Amsterdam with the remnants of his fleet he went immediately to Paris and placed formal charges against Landais. On October 15, Franklin ordered Landais to Paris to answer the twenty-five complaints laid against

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61. Allen, Naval History of Revolution, II, 473. Franklin, on the other hand, did not believe that Landais fired on the Bonhomme Richard. On March 15, 1780 he wrote the Navy Board for the Eastern Department as follows: "I will take the liberty of saying in favor of Captain Landais that, notwithstanding the mortal quarrel which rose between them at sea, it does not appear to me at all probable that he fired into the 'Bonhomme Richard' with design to kill Capt. Jones." Edward E. Hale and Edward E. Hale, Jr., Franklin In France, (Boston, 1888), I, 322.





him by Jones and the officers in his squadron.<sup>62</sup> There were not a sufficient number of naval officers in Europe to make up a Court Martial Board, but on November 15, Landais was given an opportunity to justify his acts.<sup>63</sup>

Landais' defense centered around the fact that the orders of Franklin which placed him in a subordinate position on July 25, 1779 were no longer in effect when he made the cruise with Jones.<sup>64</sup> The hearing ended with no decision being reached in the case and Franklin was left with the impression that Landais was going to the States where he could appear before an official Court Martial.

In the meantime trouble was brewing on the "Alliance" where she was lying at the Texel<sup>Roads</sup><sup>65</sup> near Amsterdam. The crew members who were formerly on the "Richard" when she captured several ships put in for their portion of the prize money. Captain Jones put them off with vague promises. However, a few days before they were to leave on another expedition the men were informed that an American agent in Amster-

62. Allen, Naval History of Revolution, II, 482-483.

+ Hale, Jr.  
63. Hale, Franklin In Paris, I, 317-322.

64. Ibid., 322.

65. An island in the North Sea off the Northern Coast of Holland. The Texel Roads are evidently between the island and the mainland.





dam had left a large sum of money on board to be distributed among them. To their consternation when the money was divided the officers received only five ducats apiece, and the men one. According to Nathaniel Fanning, a lieutenant on board at the time, it was "Believed by most of Captain Jones' officers, that he had reserved the greater part of this money for himself."<sup>66</sup>

During the next few months, Jones was cruising the "Alliance" and his reluctant crew off the coast of Spain and France.<sup>67</sup>

In early February, 1780 Jones put into the port of L'Orient, France for repairs, and went to Paris to see Franklin about the prize money, and wages for the crew. He also wanted to learn why France had not recognized his naval achievements.<sup>68</sup>

66. John S. Barnes (ed.), Fanning's Narrative, Being the Memoirs of Nathaniel Fanning An Officer of the Revolutionary Navy 1778-1783 (New York, 1912), 76.

67. According to Fanning the men were in a state "bordering on mutiny" after they left Coruna on their way back to L'Orient. Jones wanted them to sail for 20 days more in hopes of capturing another frigate and having their names "handed down to the latest posterity, by some faithful historian of our country." Fanning in a footnote said that "Jones had a wonderful notion of his name being handed down to posterity!" Ibid., 78-79.

68. Lincoln Lorenz, John Paul Jones, Fighter For Freedom and Glory, (Annapolis, 1943) 377. According to R. Sands, Jones loved "the voice of praise and breath of renown, immediately beyond all Bokhara's vaunted gold." Life and Correspondence of John Paul Jones, (New York, 1830), 256.



In Paris at this same time were Commodore Gillon, Arthur Lee, and Ralph Izard. During a dinner engagement they discussed the dismissal of Landais and its ramifications.<sup>69</sup> As each one had a particular reason for disliking either Franklin or Jones, they felt that by taking Landais' side, and capitalizing on the unrest among the "Alliance" crew members, they could cast discredit on both of them. Subsequently Lee, the lawyer, and spokesman for the group, persuaded Landais that in as much as he had received a commission from the Continental Congress, and a resolve of Congress giving him the command of the "Alliance,"<sup>70</sup> by no other authority could he be relieved of his duties.

On March 11, 1780 Landais wrote Franklin that he wanted to be reinstated on the "Alliance."<sup>71</sup> He claimed that Franklin should give him the command or a refusal in his own handwriting that he could show in Congress.<sup>71</sup> Replying the next day, Franklin wrote:

"I think you, then, so imprudent, so litigious, and quarrelsome a man, even with your best friends, that peace and good order and consequently the quiet and regular subordination so necessary to success, are, where you preside, impossible. If, therefore, I had 20 ships-of-war in my disposition, I should not give one of them Captain Landais." 72

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69. Lorenz, John Paul Jones, 389.

70. R. Sands, Life and Correspondence of John Paul Jones (New York, 1830), 268-269.

71. Hale, <sup>and Hale, Jr.</sup> Franklin in Paris, I, 326.

72. Ibid., 326-328.





Upon receipt of this letter Landais went to plot, incognito, in L'Orient for his command.<sup>73</sup> There he met Arthur Lee who was trying to get passage home on the "Alliance," and at the same time was instigating a mutiny among the crew by leading them to believe that Jones was responsible for their not receiving any prize money.<sup>74</sup> Joining this group was Gillon who was in L'Orient attempting to persuade seamen on the "Alliance" to switch to the "South Carolina," and also negotiating with the French Government over the sale of the "Serapis".

As a result of Lee's and Gillon's work one hundred and fifteen "Alliance" crew members sent a petition to Franklin demanding six months' wages, every farthing of their prize money, and the restoration of "their legal Captain P. Landais."<sup>75</sup>

On June 12, 1780 Landais wrote Lieutenant James Degge of the "Alliance" to hold the ship for him until the decision of Congress arrived and he could assume his lawful command.<sup>76</sup>

Gillon jumped into the middle of the controversy on that same date by writing letters to Landais, Franklin, and de Sartine. To Landais he wrote:

73. Lorenz, John Paul Jones, 389.

74. Allen, Naval History of Revolution, II, 527. Rumors were also spread among the officers and men of the "Alliance" that Jones was neglecting his duty to them for the gaiety of the French Court. Sands, Life and Correspondence of J. P. Jones, 265.

<sup>4</sup> Hale, Jr.  
75. Hale, Franklin in Paris, I, 331-33.

76. Pierre Landais to James Degge, June 12, 1780. Hays, Calendar of Franklin Papers, IV, 306.



"I am clear of Opinion, that without positive and Lawful orders to the contrary from your Superior officers or from Congress directed to you, you are in Honor and Duty bound to directly take & keep command of the Alliance, & restore her to those who Commissioned you, conformable to your Original Orders from them, and conformable to the Orders they have sent to Europe...77

In his letters to Franklin and de Sartine his conclusions regarding Landais' command were substantially the same except he prefaced his remarks to the former by saying "by the Laws of our Land & the Commission I have, I am the Superior Naval American Officer in Europe..." His other requests to de Sartine were for full cooperation in his endeavors to collect unengaged seamen for the "South Carolina" in French ports, particularly those attached to the "Alliance" at L'Orient; and also, with his efforts to purchase the "Serapis" for the service of his state.<sup>78</sup> Franklin was simply asked by Gillon to recommend to de Sartine that his wishes be granted.<sup>79</sup>

The next day, on June 13, while Jones was having lunch with the French Commandant of L'Orient, Landais came on board the "Alliance" and forcibly took command. After he had ordered all the officers off the ship who were sympathetic toward Jones, he moved her from L'Orient to off the Isle of

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77. Gillon to Landais, June 12, 1780. Franklin MSS., XVIII, 133.

78. Gillon to de Sartine, June 12, 1780. Franklin MSS., XVIII, 133a.

79. Gillon to Franklin, June 12, 1780. Franklin MSS., XVIII, 133.





of Croix.<sup>80</sup> When Jones heard the news he immediately appropriated a row galley which mounted three eighteen pound cannon, and 300 French troops to man her. Declining to go himself he ordered the men to board the "Alliance" not thinking that Landais would offer any resistance. Landais, however, had other plans, and when the galley got within shooting distance he sent a message that if they came within the range of his cannon, he would sink them. With that Jones' little armada turned around and headed back to the port. Fanning describes Jones' activities upon seeing them return: "He swore bitterly - he stamped - he cursed, and grew almost frantic with rage."<sup>81</sup> Jones then attempted to get three French ships of the line to help him, but they refused.<sup>82</sup>

In spite of Jones' and Franklin's efforts to detain the "Alliance" by orders, pleas, and requests, their efforts went for naught. And, on June 29, 1780 Landais set sail for Boston.<sup>83</sup>

During the trans-atlantic crossing the behavior of Captain Landais became so irresponsible that he was forcibly re-

80. Barnes, Fanning's Narrative, 82-83.

81. Ibid., 83-84.

82. Ibid., 84. In a letter to Robert Morris on June 27, 1780, Jones wrote that he had done everything necessary to stop the "Alliance" but that his sense of humanity would not allow him to witness any bloodshed between France and America. Sand, Life and Correspondence of J. P. Jones, 277, Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, III, 820-822.

83. Sands, Life and Correspondence of J.P. Jones, 280. According to Allen the 'Alliance' sailed on July 1st, Naval History of Revolution, II, 528.





lieved of his command, and Lieutenant Degge put in charge of the ship operation. The "Alliance" arrived at Boston on August 16, and soon afterwards Landais and Degge were found guilty of negligence and dismissed from the service.<sup>84</sup>

Landais spent the rest of his life in New York City, and did nothing to prove that the results of his Court Martial were unjustified. Spears, writing about his last days says:

It was his habit to take a walk on lower Broadway every day when the weather and his health permitted. He was a curious figure there, for he never appeared abroad with his old-fashioned cocked hat in its legitimate station, but carrying it forever in his hand, as a mark of homage and respect to, and in commemoration of the cruel death of his beloved sovereign.<sup>85</sup>

In the meantime Commodore Gillon had been partially successful in acquiring some seamen from the "Alliance," much to the chagrin of Jones. Writing to Robert Morris on June 27, 1780 Captain Jones blamed all his trouble on Gillon and Lee. Commenting on their activities he said:

One of these two would-be great men will now have his carriage, baggage, and family, transported from hence in the space on board the Alliance that should have been occupied by the soldiers' clothing; while the red ribboned commodore has taken advantage of the confusion, and inveigled away from the Continental service a number

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84. Allen, Naval History of Revolution, II, 528.

85. John R. Spears, The History of Our Navy, 1775-1897 (New York, 1897), I, 267-268.



of seamen, that I had redeemed from English dungeons, and fed for three months on board the Alliance, in order to man the Ariel!" 86

However, on the next day Jones was notified by de Sartine that because of his "zeal and valour... in support of the common cause..." he was to be awarded the military cross.<sup>87</sup> Being recognized by the French Court at this time helped to assuage Jones' feelings.

His tranquility was not to last long. On August 7, 1780 he wrote Franklin that Gillon was spreading a report that the "Bonhomme Richard" had been a privateer, and he was anxious to know whether Franklin was responsible for putting the idea in his head.<sup>88</sup> Furious at the thought Franklin wrote back:

"I used, merely to conceal from him (in answering his idle Demand, that I would order your Squadron, then on the point of sailing to go with him to Carolina), that the expedition was at the Expense and under the Direction of the King....The expression I used was, that the concerned had destined the Squadron for another Service. These Words, the concerned, he & the Counsellor [Lee] have interpreted to mean the Owners of a Privateer."<sup>89</sup>

86. Sands, Life and Correspondence of J. P. Jones, 278-9.

87. Ibid., 279.

88. Jones to Franklin, August 7, 1870.  
Hays, Calendar of Franklin Papers, II, 278.

89. Albert Henry Smythe, The Writings of Benjamin Franklin, (New York, 1906), VIII, 136-137.





Captain Jones left for the States aboard the "Ariel" two days after he wrote the above letter to Franklin.<sup>90</sup> Thus one of Gillon's antagonists was at least temporarily eliminated from the scene. Nevertheless, the Commodore was becoming more and more mired down with new difficulties every day.

Some seamen that Gillon had enticed away from Jones and had sent to Holland to join the crew of the "Indien" were apprehended and lodged in prison at L'Orient.<sup>91</sup> This incident, and the general turmoil over the "Alliance" in which Gillon had been a principal participant caused him to be very unpopular among the officials at L'Orient. One wrote Franklin that he thought it would add tremendously to the peacefulness of the port if the "red ribboned" Commodore would leave.<sup>92</sup>

90. Franklin to the President of Congress, August 9, 1780, Jared Sparks (ed.), The Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution (Boston, 1829), III, 161.

91. James Moylan to Franklin, June 15, 1780. Hays, Calendar of Franklin Papers, II, 261.

92. LeRoy de Chaumont to Franklin, June 19, 1780. Hays, Calendar of Franklin Papers, II, 262. John Adams in a letter to the President of Congress on June 29, 1780, blamed most of the trouble at L'Orient on the fact that the officers of the Political Minister, Board of Admiralty, Chamber of Commerce, and Commercial Agent were all combined in one man. He thought that many difficulties could be avoided if a consul were appointed at Nantes to handle all the vessels from the States. Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, III, 823.



Sometime during the summer of 1780 Gillon returned to Holland, and as John Adams later wrote, continued on "from one misfortune, Perplexity and Disappointment to another..."<sup>93</sup>

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93. John Adams to Franklin, October 25, 1781. Franklin MSS., LXI, 51.



### CHAPTER III, THE VOYAGE OF THE "SOUTH CAROLINA"

When Gillon left L'Orient he returned to Holland; and, from July to November was engaged in moving the "South Carolina" from Amsterdam to the Texel. The difficulty was caused by her tremendous draft, and the low summer tides. He finally overcame this hindrance by placing most of the heavier cargo on smaller ships, and floating the frigate on her "Broadside" for seventy miles distance. Winter set in before the Commodore had his ship properly manned or supplied, so he ran her into a small creek where she hibernated from November until January.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime Gillon was attempting to hold the men he had signed for service, hire crew members to complete the

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1. Gillon to John Laurens, March 22, 1781, "The Mission of Colonel John Laurens to Europe 1781," S.C.H.G.M., I (January, 1900), 28-32.





frigate's complement, and keep the creditors from attaching his supplies.

Realizing in the beginning that he would be unable to recruit the five hundred men needed for the efficient manning of the "South Carolina" he had authorized the Chevalier de Luxembourg to raise a private army financed by the State of South Carolina, to sail on the frigate. This the Chevalier did, and by August of 1780 nearly three hundred men of the "Legion of Luxembourg" convened at Dunkirk ready to embark.<sup>2</sup> Futile attempts were then made by their Commander Baron de Rullecourt to procure cutters, privateers, and other vessels to convoy the troops to the Texel. As the soldiers could not be sent through the Austrian Netherlands, nor through Holland (Holland was neutral at that time) there was no prospect of transporting them from Dunkirk to the Texel. Thus Luxembourg turned his attention to Havre de Grace which was the port nearest to Dunkirk where any vessel of size was to be found. On October 29, 1780 the Chevalier wrote Gillon that there was nothing left to do but to find vessels on the coast of Normandy for his corps.

The troops left Dunkirk in the middle of November arriving at Havre about December first. There they encountered more transportation difficulties. Consequently, when Luxembourg found that the "South Carolina" was to be laid up for

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2. Ibid., 30-31.



the winter he joined his "Legion" with others going on an expedition against the Island of Jersey.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile the Commodore, wintering in Amsterdam, was being harrassed by Dutch officials who felt that having an American frigate so close to Amsterdam jeopardized their state of neutrality.<sup>4</sup> In addition the precariousness of his financial position was intensified because of the British occupation of Charlestown with the resulting sequestration of his real and personal property.<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Gillon, who refused to take protection under the crown, as so many of her fellow citizens did, was banished from Carolina and took refuge at St. Augustine, Florida.<sup>6</sup>

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3. Edward Bancroft, Facts and Observations Justifying the Claims of the Prince of Luxembourg Against the State of South Carolina, and Against Alexander Gillon, Esq. (Charleston, 1784), 22-26, in Pamphlet Collection, South Carolina Library Society.

This pamphlet is attributed to Edward Bancroft by the Charleston Library Society, but it is doubtful whether he actually wrote it. Information in this work that appeared circumstantially correct was utilized.

Edward Bancroft was employed by the American Commissioners in Europe as an agent during the Revolutionary War. From December of 1776 until the end of the war he was also in the pay of the British. Bancroft died in 1821 and his double dealing did not come to light until nearly seventy years later.

See, Carl Van Doren, Secret History of the American Revolution, (New York, 1941), 431; Carl Van Doren, Benjamin Franklin, (New York, 1938) 569, 580. An account of the Jersey Expedition can be found in the Royal Gazette, (Charlestown, S.C.) April 18, 1781.

4. Bancroft, Luxembourg Claims, 16.

5. South Carolina and American General Gazette, (Charleston, S. C.) December 30, 1780.

6. Mabel L. Webber, "Josiah Smith's Diary," S.C.H.G.M., XXXIV, (April, 1933), 80.





John Adams summed up the situation in a letter to Francis Dana in February of 1781 when he said "Gillon's hour of sailing is uncertain..."<sup>7</sup>

On board the "South Carolina" conditions were going from bad to worse. Lieutenant Luke Matthewman, coming to Amsterdam after having escaped from an English prison, had signed on as a master of the ship. In his "Narrative" he described conditions on the "South Carolina" at that time:

"On my arrival on board the ship, then laying about half way between Amsterdam and the Texel, everything was in confusion, three of the Lieutenants were under arrest, and the ship like a mere wreck, her crew then about 250 men mostly Americans, who had made their escape and had got on board under pretence of giving them a passage to America; where they were near a twelve month with two miles (a part of the time) of the shore, and were never allowed the liberty of slipping over the ship's side; I myself was seven months on board, though master of the ship." <sup>8</sup>

At this instance when it looked like the Commodore's plans to get the "South Carolina" underway were doomed to failure, Lieutenant Colonel John Laurens, a fellow Carolinian, appeared in Europe.

Colonel Laurens had been appointed a special minister to the Court of Versailles on December 23, 1780. His mission was to persuade the King of the necessity of his maintaining

7. Charles Francis Adams (ed.), The Works of John Adams, (Boston, 1856), VII, 369.

8. "Narrative of Lieutenant Luke Matthewman of the Revolutionary Navy," Magazine of American History, II, (March, 1878), 183.



naval superiority in the American seas and to solicit funds and supplies for the army.<sup>9</sup> He arrived in Paris on March 19, 1781, and a few days later received his first letter from Commodore Gillon who at once saw that Laurens might be the savior whose help he needed urgently.

Written on March 22, 1781, this letter was obviously meant to pave the way for a subsequent one which followed a month later. In it he stressed the size and importance of the "South Carolina," and the debts which he and the State had incurred on her behalf. He told Laurens that he had been compelled to sell a quantity of the States supplies because of the long delays and resulting expenses, and was still three thousand pounds short. This debt, he wrote, must be paid before he could sail.<sup>10</sup>

On April 22, 1781, Gillon wrote Laurens that the ship had been brought into the Texel road on March 12, 1780 and that Captain Joyner was busy taking in ballast, water, ammunition, and cargo. Pecuniary obstacles were the only hindrance to an early departure. He proposed to Laurens that he buy ten thousand pounds of the States goods for the Continental Army. This would relieve the pressure of his creditors and allow him to ship out. If this could not be accom-

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9. "Laurens Mission," S.C.H.G.M., I, 17.

10. "Laurens Mission," S.C.H.G.M., I, 141-143.





plished he planned to sell off all this ship's stores, pay all the officers and men for their services, and return the frigate to the Chevalier de Luxembourg.<sup>11</sup>

Fortunately for the Commodore, Laurens decided to accept his proposal, and in Paris on April 28, 1781, they agreed to the following articles:

- 1) Commodore Gillon was to deliver the invoices of the material on board the South Carolina to such a person as Colonel Laurens should authorize to receive them. This person was to select the articles which could be utilized for the Continental service, and reject the rest.
- 2) Gillon agreed to cede goods at cost for the use of the Continental forces to the amount of 10,000 pounds sterling.
- 3) Gillon was to make every effort to make as much space available to Colonel Laurens for such supplies as he would order to be shipped from Holland on Continental account.
- 4) Gillon was to proceed to sea completely fitted and manned by May 20, 1781 at the latest.
- 5) Gillon agreed to proceed directly to Philadelphia without stopping at any port, or giving distant chase to any enemy rival.
- 6) Colonel Laurens agreed to pay for the goods transferred to Continental account on bills of exchange drawn by the Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States in Holland, on the Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States in France, at six months sight, to the order of Commodore Gillon.
- 7) Gillon for the above consideration acknowledged the cession to Colonel Laurens of a quantity of the merchandise equal to the sum of £10,000.<sup>12</sup>

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11. Gillon to Laurens, April 22, 1781, "Laurens Mission," S.C.H.G.M., I, 136-140.

12. "Laurens Mission," S.C.H.G.M., I, 141-143.





On the same day the articles were signed, Laurens dispatched his secretary Major William Jackson to Amsterdam to supervise the transfer of material to continental accounts and to purchase other war supplies to fill the available space on the "South Carolina". The Major was also ordered to take charge of the shipment and security of a sum of specie to be transported by the "South Carolina" for the government of the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Writing to John Adams, the American Minister at Amsterdam, Laurens explained his reasons for utilizing the services of Commodore Gillon and the "South Carolina". He requested Adams to draw the bills for the payment of the new purchases, and the cargo already on board. The bills for the purchase of new supplies were to be made payable to John de Neufville and Company, merchants in Amsterdam, who were to provide and ship the additional cargo on continental account.<sup>14</sup>

John Adams who had always been a friend to Gillon<sup>15</sup> wrote in answer to Lauren's letter: "I am very happy to find it is in your power to assist Commodore Gillon upon this oc-

13. Laurens to Jackson, April 28, 1781, in "Laurens Mission," S.C.H.G.M., I, 144-145.

14. Laurens to Adams, April 28, 1781, in "Laurens Mission," S.C.H.G.M., I, 145-147.

15. Adams took the side of Gillon and Lee in the Landais affair. See letter from Adams to Franklin, June 26, 1780, in Hale, Franklin in France, I, 340-341.



casion, whose industry and skill and perseverance have merited every assistance that can be legally given him."<sup>16</sup>

Before Colonel Laurens departed for America on May 28, 1781,<sup>17</sup> he sent 1,500,000 livres to the banking house of Fizeauz and Grand in Amsterdam.<sup>18</sup> This sum, a portion of six million which the king of France had granted to the United States for purchases in France,<sup>19</sup> was to be delivered to Major Jackson for shipment on the "South Carolina". Franklin, who was not consulted about the plan, and feeling the financial position of the United States would be jeopardized if the money were allowed to leave, ordered Jackson to return the specie to France.<sup>20</sup> This action precipitated a violent controversy between Jackson and Franklin.

When Jackson received the order on July 2, 1781, he was so upset that during the course of the day he wrote three letters to Franklin explaining the dire consequences if he did

16. Adams to Laurens, May 8, 1781, in Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 404-405.

17. John Laurens to Franklin, May 28, 1781, "Laurens Mission", S.C.H.G.M., II, 108.

18. Jackson to Franklin, July 2, 1781, in Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 529.

19. Count de Vergennes to Franklin, June 8, 1781, in Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, III, 216.

20. Franklin to Jackson, June 28, 1781, in Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 523.





~~not~~ to carry out the command of Colonel Laurens regarding the disposition of the currency. He wrote that Laurens had obtained by "the most unremitting assiduity" a sum of money which the French government thought could safely be shipped to the States on the frigate "South Carolina!" America, Jackson wrote, would suffer from disappointment if the money was not shipped "by so excellent a conveyance." If Franklin refused to rescind orders he was planning to "arrest" the money in the hands of M. Fizeaux.<sup>21</sup>

Franklin answered Jackson in two letters which he wrote on July 5<sup>th</sup>. In them he explained that he, and not Laurens, had obtained the six millions from France, and that Laurens had simply negotiated with Holland for a loan of ten million which had not as yet produced anything. He advised Jackson that it would be "exceedingly imprudent" not to obey his order, and that he would have to take the consequences of any action which he planned.<sup>22</sup> Commenting on the security of the "South Carolina" in a letter of July 6 he wrote: "As to the Safty of the excellent Conveyance you mention, I must own I have

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21. Jackson to Franklin, July 2, 1781, in Sparks, Diplomatic Correspondence, VI, 223, 226; Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 529-530.

22. Franklin to Jackson, July 5, 1781, in Sparks, Diplomatic Correspondence, III, 227-229; Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 543-544.



some doubts about it, and I fear I shall hear of the arrival of that ship in England, before she sees America."<sup>23</sup>

On July 5, Major Jackson wrote a fourth letter to Franklin blaming the retention of the "South Carolina" on his order prohibiting the transfer of the 1,500,000 livres. If Franklin continued to refuse to free this currency he threatened to solicit the interference of the French Court.<sup>24</sup>

By the time Franklin received this letter he had been informed that Count de Vergennes, the French Foreign Secretary, was completely ignorant of Lauren's proposal to ship the money on the "South Carolina"; and that he was opposed to the whole plan. In addition he had been notified that Major Jackson had purchased through John de Neufville and Company goods valued at £ 40,000. This was in addition to the £ 10,000 that was transferred from the account of South Carolina to the United States. On July 10, he wrote Jackson accusing him of being a "Novice in affairs of the public credit" and that the "Noise" he had made about the matter had "already done great mischief to our credit in Holland."<sup>25</sup>

23. Franklin to Jackson, July 6, 1781, in Sparks, Diplomatic Correspondence, III, 229-232; Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 545-546.

24. Jackson to Franklin, July 5, 1781, in Hays, Calendar of Franklin Papers, II, 383.

25. Smythe, Writings of Franklin, VIII, 281-284.



While the South Carolina was being loaded with cargo at the Texel the Legion of Luxembourg, 300 strong, arrived from Dunkirk.<sup>26</sup> It was soon discovered that space was not available for the men as well as for all of the material which Jackson and de Neufville had purchased for the Continental forces.<sup>27</sup> As a result two smaller ships, the "Liberty" and the "Aurora", were assigned to take the surplus cargo. It was revealed later that John de Neufville and Company had an interest in both ships which caused them some embarrassment during subsequent investigations.<sup>28</sup>

Complicating matters even more for Commodore Gillon was the fact that Major Jackson refused to relinquish the Bills of Exchange with which he could have paid his debts. Later investigations proved that Jackson had become suspicious of Commodore Gillon's intentions by the remarks of Franklin, and

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26. They arrived at the Texel in the middle of June, 1781. Bancroft, Luxembourg Claims, 24.

27. Gillon claimed that he had many times acquainted Jackson with the fact that there would not be enough room on the "South Carolina" when the troops came aboard. Gillon to Franklin, October 4, 1781. Franklin MSS.; LXI, 48.

28. John de Neufville and Company owned one-half of the "Liberty" and one-fourth of the "Aurora". John de Neufville to Franklin, December 7, 1781, Franklin MSS., XXIII, 104.





began to feel duty bound to withhold the stipulated amount.<sup>29</sup>

Thus hounded by creditors, and fearing that the Dutch authorities would take over the frigate, he decided to move outside their limit of jurisdiction. But early on the morning of August 4, 1781, when all the hands were called to get the ship under way, a mutiny occurred, the events of which were carefully, if not grammatically, recorded in the Log:<sup>30</sup>

This morning att 4 A.M. Call<sup>d</sup> all hands to on move ship - The French Sailors that come from Dunkirk Denied to heve up the anchors till tha had thair Wages Paid them thay sune asembled one and all on the Quarter Dack & Refused thair Duty Before Lieut. Grinnell He Emead-etly Acquainted the Commodore & Capt. Joyner of itt All Hands was Call<sup>d</sup> again to Wash Down the Dacks tha Made a beginin and Partly Wash<sup>d</sup> Down the pupe att  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 7 the Commodore & Capt. Joyner Come on the Quarter Dack & call<sup>d</sup> all those that had a hand in the Mutiny French Americans & Irish the Commodore asked them whither tha would work or No Som of them gave for answer yes & som of them No one William Larnder one of the Ringleaders in this Mutiny was brought to the Gangway & Rec<sup>d</sup> 125 Lashes & one of the French Man Antonil Parcone Rec<sup>d</sup> with a Cutlash 50 Shocks on his Back and Rear & Grove was cut in the Left Arm by the French Comadant for Disobedents of orders & Severil more of them Cut with Cutlasses Which if tha had thare Dizerts tha would Have bin Hanged att the yard Arm att 8 A.M. John Cowing that had Hid himself was found and put in irons. He was one of the Heads of these Villins that Mutiny and all the Villins Dispersed Emead-etly att 2 P.M. the Commo-dore and Maj. Jackson & some attendants sett off in the Pilot boat to Sound the Channel att 4 P.M. Refid Topsails call<sup>d</sup> all Hands to on move ship att 6 P.M. the Commodore and Maj. Jackson returned...with thare attendents

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29. Journals of Continental Congress, XXIII, 704.

30. In a letter to John Jay, Gillon reported that there were 150 men involved in the mutiny. Gillon to Jay, September 30, 1781. Franklin MSS., LXI, 46.



att 11 P. M. on Movd. Ship.<sup>31</sup>

As Gillon cruised off the Coast of Holland, waiting to take the "Liberty" and the "Aurora" under his convoy, disputes began to rage among the passengers as to the Commodore's ability and integrity. Those critical of Gillon were led by Major Jackson and included Lieutenant Colonel Searle,<sup>32</sup> and John Trumbull.<sup>33</sup> Other passengers were: Mr. LeRoy from New York; Mr. Brailsford<sup>34</sup> of South Carolina; Dr. Waterhouse of Rhode Island; Captain Joshua Barney;<sup>35</sup> Mr. Van Stasselt;<sup>36</sup> and the youngest son of John Adams. In addition the official

31. Log-Book of the Frigate South Carolina, August 4, 1781, to May 21, 1782, (in National Archives, Washington), August 4, 1781.

32. Searle was a Lieutenant Colonel in the militia of Pennsylvania. He had purchased £ 2,000 worth of supplies in Europe for that State and was accompanying them home on the "South Carolina." Gillon to Franklin, October 4, 1781, Franklin MSS., LXI, 48.

33. John Trumbull, the son of Governor Trumbull of Connecticut had been studying painting in London under Benjamin West. He was arrested in November of 1780, on a reprisal move when the British heard of the death of Major Andre in America. He spent eight months in prison and was released through the intercession of West. Autobiography of John Trumbull, 1756-1841, (New York, 1841), 68-73.

34. Brailsford was the nephew of Thomas Bee of South Carolina. At that time Bee was a member of Congress from South Carolina. Gillon to Jay, September 30, 1781.

35. Captain Barney had recently escaped from a prison in England. He came to Holland where he found out about the "South Carolina" from John Adams. Mary Barney (ed.), A Biographical Memoir of the Late Commodore Joshua Barney, (Boston, 1832), 107.

36. A Dutch merchant.





correspondence of Adams<sup>37</sup> and Francis Dana<sup>38</sup> was being carried to Philadelphia on the frigate.

Finally, on the night of August 19, Major Jackson agreed to turn over the Bills of Exchange to Gillon. This was only after the Commodore had agreed to sign the charter parties<sup>39</sup> of the "Liberty" and "Aurora," and had given Jackson a general order for all the goods belonging to South Carolina, which were on these lighters. It was agreed that on the following morning Jackson and Mr. Brailsford were to go ashore, complete all the business, and bring the ships out to meet the "South Carolina." Gillon in a letter to John Jay describes what happened the next day to foil the plan:

We stood close in & at break of day was within half a mile of the Bar, when from a calm a sudden Gust of N.W. Wind arose on which we carried no little difficulty to clear off a Lee Shore the Gale increased, & made our situation very critical, but about 4...in the morning of the 21st the Wind Shifted Somewhat & we got off... 40

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37. John Adams to the President of Congress, October 15, 1781, Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 779.

38. Francis Dana to the President of Congress, May 20, 1781, Ibid., VIII, 281.

39. A charter party is a mercantile lease of a vessel. Evidently the owners of the "Liberty" and "Aurora" would not allow them to sail under convoy of Commodore Gillon until he signed the leases. Gillon probably did not want to assume this responsibility as he had nothing to do with the purchase of the goods.

40. Gillon to Jay, September 30, 1781. A very dramatic account of this storm is given in Trumbull's Autobiography, 83. He claimed that the "South Carolina" became unmanageable under Gillon's command and that Captain Barney had to take over the ship. The incident was not mentioned in Barney's Memoirs.



The officers and crew became so alarmed by the storm, and by reports that a British fleet was hovering in the vicinity,<sup>41</sup> that after a council was held it was decided to strike out for America and abandon the idea of convoying the two small ships.<sup>42</sup> The ramifications of this action will be covered in detail later.

Avoiding the English Channel, Commodore Gillon began sailing the "South Carolina" north about England. On August 25, they captured a cutter, took off the men and stores, and then burned it.<sup>43</sup>

When the "South Carolina" reached the Orkney Islands, Gillon and his officers decided that provisions were too low to attempt a trans-atlantic trip, and consequently they would have to sail to the nearest friendly port. In addition to the lack of supplies, the officers were having continuous trouble with the crew who Gillon claimed were being agitated by Major Jackson and Colonel Searle.<sup>44</sup> The Log-Book speaks for itself:

41. Their fears about a British fleet were justified. On August 28, 1781, the British Admiralty received word of "a large Dutch fleet having sailed from the Texel under convoy of a 64 gun ship". Orders were immediately dispatched to intercept them. See, Royal Gazette, October 27, 1781.

42. Gillon to Jay, September 30, 1781.

43. Log-Book of South Carolina, August 25, 1781.

44. Gillon to Franklin, October 4, 1781.





Monday, August 27, 1781 - Att 10 A.M, one of the french Sargents Drawed his hanger on the Boatswain the Sargent was ordered on the Pupe under a Sentinels care by Capt. Joyners orders.

Tuesday, August 28, 1781 - Att 4 P.M. a french mareen was floged 150 lashes for stealing.

Thursday, September 13, 1781, - Att 1/2 past 12 P.M. tew Solgers was floged with a Naked Cutlas and one of them put back in Irons on the Pupe.

With provisions being exhausted and dissatisfaction spreading among passengers and crew, the "South Carolina" changed directions and headed towards Coruna, Spain.

On September 7, off the coast of Ireland they captured a brig from Liverpool, mounting sixteen 6 pounders and carrying sixty men. Two men from the "South Carolina" were sent to command her,<sup>45</sup> after which they continued on their way, arriving at Coruna on September 23, 1781.<sup>46</sup>

In a letter to John Jay, the American Minister at Madrid, Gillon related the occurrences when he moored at Coruna:

"On our arrival here where we were all unacquainted, the Captain & I went on shore to report the ship & visit the Commanding Officers, leaving General Orders for no Intercourse with the shore till we returned on board.... On their going on shore the morning of the 24th Instant Major Jackson & Col. Searle were requested to confine any resentment they had to the supposed Aggressor, & not to predjudice the Ship or the Service, instead of which tho' I had made all arrangements for a supply of Provisions they took every method to decry the Validity of the Bills, tho' accepted by his Excellency B. Franklin Esq. & tore

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45. Log-Book of South Carolina, September 7, 1781.

46. Gillon to Jay, September 30, 1781.





the Seconds, by all of which the firsts I could not pass here thus by their imprudence we was reduced to a very disagreeable Dilemma, 550 men on board, nothing to EAT, & a valuable Ship liable to be kept from the Continent happily there was some Effects of the State of South Carolina's onboard, exclusive of those which Major Jackson had selected in consequence of the Contract (which Contract he has now entirely overset, & rejects the whole of the Invoice) which with difficulty I prevailed on Mr. Logoanere to take in payment, so that we **are** now hard at it to refit & take in our Provisions..." 47

On September 26, 1781 Major Jackson and Colonel Searle wrote letters to Franklin and John Jay<sup>48</sup> condemning Gillon's behavior. Jackson thanked Franklin for protecting the money in Holland from Gillon and said:

"I conceive my country indebted to your prudence for the preservation of her property, as I do myself for my freedom at this instant; for, I am assured, had not your precaution prevented the embarkation, I should at this hour have been a prisoner; I need not say where." 49

Taking the Commodore's side in the controversy were

47. Gillon to Jay, September 30, 1781.

Searle and Jackson hailed a French frigate in Coruna harbor and got ashore just after Commodore Gillon and his party. See, letter from Silas Deane to Isaac Hazlehurst, October 26, 1781, in "The Deane Papers," Collections of the New York Historical Society, XXII, (1888) 520.

On October 24, 1781, Deane wrote Edward Bancroft: "I am not surprised at Gillon's conduct nor do I envy his Passengers their situation, I expect to hear that Gillon has sold the vessel and cargo and gone off with the effects." Ibid., 519.

48. Jay to President of Congress, October 3, 1781, in Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 765.

49. Smythe, Life and Writings of Franklin, VIII, 279.



Dr. Waterhouse and one of the "Dutch Gentlemen"<sup>50</sup> on board the "South Carolina." The former in a letter to John Adams blamed all the difficulties on Jackson, and two or three other passengers, who took offense without just cause. He ended his letter by saying: "I had and always shall have a high degree of respect for Commodore Gillon, as an able and honorable man."<sup>51</sup>

Unrest among the passengers was not the only thing which made Gillon's sojourn at Coruna uncomfortable. On October 8, 1781, the Spanish Minister, Count de Florida Blanca, wrote John Jay that there were two deserters from a Spanish army regiment on board the "South Carolina," and that Commodore Gillon had refused to relinquish them to the proper authorities. Jay wrote immediately to Gillon demanding that he turn the deserters over to the Spanish officials. Gillon replied that the charges against him were precipitate, and predicted that Jay would hear nothing more from the Spanish minister about it. This prediction proved correct as Jay later explained in a re-

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50. Adams in a letter to Franklin on October 25, 1781, mentioned that one of the "Dutch Gentlemen" on board had written one of his friends in Australia that Gillon had not cruised but had been delayed by "contrary winds." Franklin MSS., LXI, 51. In the same letter Adams told Franklin that Commodore Gillon's reputation was above reproach in Holland and that he had "never suspected him of any design like that suggested by Jackson..."

51. John Bigelow, The Complete Works of Benjamin Franklin, (New York, 1888), VII, 547.





port to Robert Livingston.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile as the "South Carolina" was being provisioned there was continued unrest among the crew. The Log-Book reveals the following incidents which took place while the ship was moored at Coruna:

Saturday October 6, 1781 - Seven or eight Frenchmen jumped in the Joly boat and immediately rowed ashore. Several pistols fired butt they got on shore.

Thursday October 11, 1781 - Last night att 11 oclock The French men were Discovered in Laing a Plot to Rise & had Severil Muskets Loaded with balls Severil of the heads of them ware taken & Put In Irons on the Quarter Dock.

Monday October 15, 1781 - Four Frenchmen who were ringleaders of mutiny put on board the French ship Ariel.

Finally, on October 17, 1781, the "South Carolina" sailed from Coruna and headed for the Canary Islands. The ship was without the malcontented group,<sup>53</sup> and minus between 50 and 60 sick French and American seamen who were left at the hospital in the city.<sup>54</sup>

Four days out from Coruna the "South Carolina" captured the Brig. "Venus" from New Foundland,<sup>55</sup> loaded with 1600

52. The whole controversy is explained in a lengthy report Jay made to Robert Livingston on April 28, 1782. See, Sparks, Diplomatic Correspondence, V, 338-341.

53. Lieutenant Colonel. Searle, Captain Jackson (with Adam's son) John Trumbull, Captain Barney, booked passage on the privateer "Cicero." See, Gillon to Jay, September 30, 1781.

54. Log-Book of the South Carolina, October 17, 1781.

55. Log-Book of the South Carolina, October 21, 1781.



quintals of salt fish.<sup>56</sup> On November 2, 1781, she and the "Venus" reached St. Croix de Teneriffe<sup>57</sup> in the Canary Islands and Commodore Gillon immediately set about disposing of the brig and its cargo. When he had completed the sale he made the remittance payable to the State of South Carolina.<sup>58</sup>

On November 24 they "waied anchor & stood out to Sea", leaving behind another thirty indisposed men in the hospital on the island.<sup>59</sup> However, losing the discontented passengers and nearly a hundred members of the crew, did not stop the unrest on the "South Carolina." Her log-book records the following incidents in November and December of 1781:

Wednesday, November 28, 1781 - At 2 P.M. one of the French Marines was flogged for theft, Another flogged for disobedience.

Sunday, December 2, 1781 - Mr. Hopes put under arrest for sleeping on Dack in his Watch itt was Soppoosed that he was drunk by one of the Lieutenants.

Tuesday, December 4, 1781 - John Cockrun put in Irons for getting Drunk.

Sunday, December 9, 1781 - John the Swead has bin mising this Last 24 Hours. 60

Monday December 17, 1781 - Att 1/2 past 1 P.M. a Dispite Arose Betwixt the Salors and the French Solgers for Whitch fore of them that was Ringleaders ware put in Irons.

56. Bancroft, Luxembourg Claims, 29.

57. Log-Book of the South Carolina, November 2, 1781.

58. Bancroft, Luxembourg Claims, 29.

59. Log-Book of the South Carolina, November 24, 1781.

60. Subsequent pages in the "Log" fail to reveal whether "John the Swead" was ever found.





Sunday December 23, 1781 - Att 4 P.M. called all hands on the Quarter Dack to see a Mareen Punished for theft.

On December 31, 1781, the men on the "South Carolina" sighted Charlestown at a distance of four or five leagues. But as the city was still occupied by the British, Gillon turned the frigate about and headed towards Havana.

One night as the "South Carolina" cruised between the Bahama Islands and the Florida Keys a Jamaican fleet of five vessels was sighted off the starboard bow by the deck officer, Lieutenant John Mayrant. The following is an account of their capture by the "South Carolina" as it was told to Dr. Alexander Garden:

"At 4 A.M. the frigate was close aboard four of them and another ship was to be seen at about five miles to windward; to secure the whole prize was now the object of the Commodore, but one, which there was no possibility of attaining without having recourse to artifice; and after a hasty consultation with his officers, the following line of conduct was determined on: - In the first place, the Frigate having British colours flying, hailed the four ships nearest to her, ordering them to heave to, and promising to send a boat aboard of them. Lieutenant Mayrant, was then ordered to take a barge, and with twenty-four choice men and about four or five marines, (himself as well as the marines) being all in British uniform to make for the furthest vessel, he did so, and when arrived under her stern...in answer to the Captain's inquiry, as to what boat that was, replied that it was the barge of the D'Artois, commanded by Captain M'Bride: the Captain ordered him to keep off, threatening to fire into him. Lieutenant Mayrant, in return, commanded him to heave a rope immediately, and asking if he would dare to fire into His Majesty's boat, ordered his men to pull along side: on hearing this, the British ship, without further dispute hove a rope, and manned her sides; such being the ceremony usually observed in receiving an officer, Lieutenant Mayrant immediately stept on board,





having previously ordered his men not to follow but on receiving a concerted signal; the Captain received him with great politeness, ... Lieutenant Mayrant desired to see his papers, in order to examine them: No sooner had the Captain gone below, in search of them, than Lieutenant Mayrant's men, receiving the expected signal, stepped on board to the number of twenty, all with cutlasses, and having pistols concealed under their jackets. The Captain having returned, Lieut. Mayrant, after examining the papers, inquired how many men he had on board, and on his replying that there were forty, ordered him to take his papers and twenty men, and to go with them on board the Frigate; he replied 'why, surely Sir, you do not mean to impress my men at sea; Lieut. M. replied, 'certainly not, but Captain M'Bride, being a very particular man, wishes to examine the men and papers himself'. The Captain still hesitated, upon which Lieut. Mayrant reiterating his order, made a sign to his men to draw their sabres, on perceiving which, the Captain, not choosing to risk a contest, obeyed, Lieut. M. ordered him to row off while he would undertake to carry the ship down to the Frigate. As soon as the Captain was fairly off, Lieut. M. ordering the remainder of the crew below, reversed the British colours. At which sight, the consternation of the Captain, who, from the barge, was a spectator of what passed, may be better conceived than expressed; he declared it to be a damned Yankee trick; but, the deception was discovered too late, and he found himself obliged to go on board the Frigate: by this means, Commodore Gillon was enabled to capture the whole fleet, consisting of five Jamaica men, heavily laden with sugar and rum." 61

On January 13, 1782, Commodore Gillon cruised the "South Carolina," and his captured prizes into Havana harbor. There he sold the three ships and two brigantines with the cargo for

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61. Alexander Garden, Anecdotes of the Revolutionary War, (Charleston, 1822), 103-105.



\$91,500.<sup>62</sup>

Gillon remained at Havana for several months and in April was persuaded by General Cagigal, Captain General of the Island of Cuba, to take part in a Spanish expedition against the island of New Providence in the Bahamas. His letter written to Governor John Matthews on May 15, 1782, while he was aboard the "South Carolina" explains in detail the part played by the Commodore in the subduing of the island.

"....The assistance the South Carolina received in her refits at the Havannah, the aid she had in other Spanish ports with many other reasons now unknown to your Excellency, were among other, powerful reasons for my acceding to General Cagigal's request of taking command of the sea forces destined against these islands, which consisted of 59 Spanish and American vessels....<sup>63</sup>

## 62. Bancroft, Luxembourg Claims, 37.

Bancroft later declared that merchants at Havana claimed that Gillon would have realized a much greater price had the ships been offered at public sale. Gillon denied this and said that he had not wished to undergo the expense of a sale. Ibid., 37. Gillon wrote Arthur Middleton, a South Carolina delegate in Congress, on January 30, 1782, acquainting him with the details of the capture of the prizes of war. Middleton then informed Governor John Matthews, of South Carolina. See, "Correspondence of Hon. Arthur Middleton," S.C.H.G.M., XXVII, (April, 1926) 51. When Governor Matthews heard about Gillon's exploit he wrote General Francis Marion alerting him to the possibility of the Commodore sending "a vessel or two to Georgetown!" See, R. W. Gibbes, Documentary History of the American Revolution, (New York, 1857), II, 168.

63. According to the Royal Gazette of June 1, 1782, two thousand regular, and three hundred colored soldiers embarked "in upwards of 60 small vessels, which were convoyed by the rebel frigate South Carolina, commanded by Gillon, and a Spanish ship of twenty guns!"





We sailed from the Havannah the 22nd Ultimo April 22, 1782. A current prevented out taking our departure from thence until the 28th...On the 5th Inst. (May 5, 1782) we were before the "Island of Providence" with all the fleet. While some of the American vessels of war blocked up the several outlets at the north side of the island, some others took their stations in the offing, the "South Carolina" keeping off and on till five o'clock when she took her station as near to the bar of the harbor as she could, and within gunshot of Fort Nassau their principal fort, with the design to draw the enemy's attention that way while the transports were preparing to land troops, during which time General Cagigal sent a flag from his ship in a Spanish tender to Governor Maxwell requesting him to mention the terms on which he would surrender the Bahama Islands to his Catholic Majesty... The next day at nine o'clock Governor Maxwell sent one of the principal inhabitants on board the "South Carolina" with proposals which were not accepted...All the American vessels continued as near their stations as the winds, shoals and circumstances would admit....At five o'clock Mr. Miranda,<sup>64</sup> an aide to his Excellency, went with a flag in the schooner "Surprise", ...to close the capitulation. The next day he returned having adjusted the business... and on the 8th instant his Excellency landed his army and took possession of the forts and town...these islands... being in the possession of a friend or an enemy is no small consequence to the United States, especially as the different shoals and small islands form a shelter

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64. Francisco de Miranda, a soldier of fortune, had been apprehended several times by the Spanish government for shady financial deals. He was later accused by Commodore Gillon of making "certain misrepresentations to General Cagigal whereby a contract was not signed which would have netted the State of South Carolina \$60,000 Mexican dollars for Gillon's service in the Campaign." See, William S. Robertson, "Francisco de Miranda and The Revolutionizing of Spanish America," Annual Report of the American Historical Association, I, (1907), 240-241.

For an account of the efforts made to secure compensation from Spain see, Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, 1783-1789 (Washington, 1837), III, 321-323, 347, 355, 361.



for cruisers; and from the particular turn these people have for privateering, they succeeded so well to capture upwards of 150 vessels during the last twelve months many of which were American, I cannot but congratulate our State in particular on this conquest as it was from this spot our enemies in Charlestown received many supplies..... I feel myself happy in assisting your Excellency, that the success of this expedition was entirely owing to the great attention the Captains and officers of the American vessels of war paid in convoying such a fleet through such difficult and infrequented a passage, with a beating wind all the way, we disappointed any plans the enemy might have formed of attacking us in our way through the Gulf of Florida....." 65

From the West Indies the "South Carolina" sailed with a convoy to Philadelphia, arriving there in the early part of June, 1782.<sup>66</sup>

The "South Carolina" was moored at Philadelphia until December, and during that time the Commodore was endeavoring to ready her for sea duty and recruit new members for her decimated crew. On October 2, 1782, by a resolution in Congress, he was allowed to enlist up to fifty Hessian prison-

65. Letter from Gillon to Governor Matthews of South Carolina, June 4, 1782, quoted in Middlebrook, Frigate South Carolina, 10-12. The Bahama Islands were recaptured by the British on April 18, 1783. The conquering expedition was led by Colonel Andrew DeVeaux, a tory officer in the British service. See South-Carolina Weekly Gazette (Charleston, S.C.), May 24, 1783.

66. According to Smith a British privateer from New York fell in with the "South Carolina in Latitude 36° and followed her fleet until they reached the Delaware Coast. However, the privateer made no attempt to engage the "South Carolina" but did fire a few rounds in the hopes of attracting some of the Royal Navy to the spot. See, "Gillon and the Frigate South Carolina," S.C.H.G.M., IX, 215.





ers for service on the frigate.<sup>67</sup> Even with this addition the complement of men on the "South Carolina" was only 450 when she finally put to sea.

When the Chevalier de Luxembourg heard that the "South Carolina" was docked at Philadelphia he notified the French minister Luzerne that Commodore Gillon should be arrested for breach of contract. Luxembourg was particularly irate because he had received no payments from the proceeds of the prizes taken. At a court hearing in November of 1782, Robert Morris and Luzerne, representing the Chevalier, agreed to absolve the Commodore from his many obligations if he would relinquish all claims to the ship. This Gillon refused to do; and, going aboard the "South Carolina" abdicated his command to Captain Joyner, and ordered him to put to sea as soon as possible.<sup>68</sup>

Under Captain Joyner's command the "South Carolina" sailed from Philadelphia during the first part of December. After cruising off the Delaware capes for a short while she was captured by three British ships on December 22, 1782. An account of the capture appeared in the South Carolina Weekly Gazette of February 22, 1783:

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67. Journals of Continental Congress, XXIII, 632.

68. Lorenz, J. P. Jones, 500.





"New York, December 23, yesterday was sent in here by his Majesty's ships Quebec, Capt. Mason; Atrea, Captain Ferguson, and Diomedé, Capt. Frederick, the ship South Carolina, Capt. Joyner, of 44 guns, (28 of which are 42 pounders) and 500 men from Phila. for Europe. She had under her convoy three other vessels, two of which are taken and brought in also!" 69

Meanwhile American officials in Holland were finally unraveling the last complexity caused by Gillon's failure to take the ships "Liberty" and "Aurora" under his convoy when he sailed from Amsterdam. The problem was confused by the dual ownership of the ships (John de Neufville Co. and the Van Arp Co. both merchants in Amsterdam), Gillon's contract with Laurens which complicated the ownership of the purchased goods, and lengthy arguments over the efficiency of Major Jackson, and the honesty and integrity of Commodore Gillon and the Dutch merchants. The whole affair precipitated a voluminous correspondence between the various officials, and can be followed very closely in the published diplomatic correspondence of the Revolution.<sup>70</sup> For the sake of brevity only the important details will be treated in this paper.

In November, 1781 Franklin received a letter from John de

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69. S. C. Weekly Gazette, February 22, 1783.

Captain Joyner was honorably acquitted by a Court Martial Board in March, 1784, of any dereliction of duty in connection with the loss of the frigate.

See, Acts, Ordinances, and Resolves of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina Passed in the Year 1784 (Charleston, 1784), 13-14. Also Johnson, Memoirs, 133.

70. From August, 1781 to September, 1782.



Neufville informing him that the freight would be much higher on the goods carried by the two ships due to the inclement weather, and the fact that they would not be under convoy. As an alternative to paying freight they suggested that the United States government buy the vessels.<sup>71</sup> Franklin was opposed to this and writing to John Adams on November 7, 1781, he said that perhaps Jackson was ignorant of the quantity of the goods bought "But me thinks Messrs. Neufville might have known it, and would have advised against such an enormous purchase, if augmenting the commission and the project of freighting their own ships had not blinded their eyes."<sup>72</sup>

As Jackson had returned to America, and not to France, as had been first believed, Franklin in November sent Thomas Barclay to Amsterdam to try ~~to~~ make a satisfactory arrangement about the disposition of the ships and goods.<sup>73</sup>

In the meantime the goods had been taken off the "Liberty" and "Aurora" and stored in the respective warehouses of de Neufville and Van Arp, to hold until their claims were settled.

On December 5, John de Neufville, worried over the pos-

71. Franklin to Thomas M'Kean, November 5, 1781, in Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 827.

72. Franklin to Adams, November 23, 1781, in Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 835.

73. Franklin to Adams, November 23, 1781, in Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 857.





sibility of alienating the American government, wrote Van Arp proposing that they approach Franklin and Adams with the proposition of accepting a settlement based on the findings of three impartial merchants as arbitrators. He emphasized to Van Arp that his company would not be the cause of blocking any agreement.<sup>74</sup>

In a long letter to Franklin on December 7, de Neufville outlined the part his company played in the various transactions with Gillon and Jackson, and said he would gladly relinquish his interest in the ships and cooperate to the fullest, in any amicable settlement.<sup>75</sup>

By this time Thomas Barclay had reached Amsterdam and on January 6, 1782 he reported to Franklin that he had received 393 packages of clothing and 130 boxes of tin from the warehouses of Van Arp and Co. In the de Neufville warehouse he had found 202 packages which were ready for delivery. Commenting on his dealings with Van Arp and de Neufville he wrote:

"After having been delayed, and I thought trifled with a good deal, I applied to Mr. Van Arp himself and I own I was surprised at his obstinacy, and at the little appearance of confidence which he seemed to put in Mr. de Neufville in short the more I ex-

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74. John de Neufville to Van Arp and Co., December 5, 1781 in Franklin MSS.; XLVII, II.

75. de Neufville to Franklin, December 7, 1781, in Franklin MSS.; XXIII, 104.



amined the matter the less I blamed this last gentleman....At the same time I thought it proper to put the goods in a Train entirely independent of him as so many objections had already arisen on the side of the owners of the vessels of which he was one." 76

Barclay seemed to be reaching a satisfactory conclusion to the whole business when de Neufville and Van Arp, and several other merchants in Amsterdam, refused to turn over the goods which Gillon had purchased for South Carolina, on the grounds that the Commodore still owed them money. Franklin was furious when he heard this as he had already paid for the goods they were retaining and wrote Adams that the whole thing was "a villanous affair from beginning to end."<sup>77</sup>

Completely frustrated by this time Barclay wrote Franklin summarizing his unfortunate predicament:

"The situation of the Goods sold by Mr. Gillon is such that I hardly know what is best to be done, for having made myself as much master of the subject as I cou'd, I am of the opinion it is only from Mr. Gillon that any certain information or consequence can come. Mr. Zeigler of this place has got some Bales of Goods which Mr. Gillon left in his hands, but he has a demand against the State of South Carolina, and will not deliver any of them but to Mr. Gillon's order. Messrs. Rich. and Jacob Van Stophurst are exactly in the same situation....The 51 chests of linen mentioned in the List of goods purchased by Colon<sup>e</sup> Laurence, were, I am informed by M. de Neufville Jun. pledged with some person by Mr. Gillon himself, and a Capt.

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76. Thomas Barclay to Franklin, January 6, 1782, in Franklin MSS., XXIV, II.

77. Franklin to Adams, February 12, 1782, in Adams, Works of Adams, VII, 510.



Grindal who is here, informed me that he was told by a person from Corunna that Mr. Gillon had landed the Copper Wire, and sold it to pay the ships disbursements.... 78

Prior to this Barclay had made arrangements to purchase half of a 230 ton ship named the "General Sullivan" in order to transport the goods to the United States.<sup>79</sup> In his letter of February 28, 1782 he had mentioned to Franklin that he had sent an American master, Capt, DuShone, to Ostend to command the "General Sullivan," and expected her to arrive in ten days, "when she shall be immediately dispatched."<sup>80</sup>

Barclay remained in Amsterdam throughout the spring and summer of 1782 to complete the business, and it was not until July that a final settlement was made with John de Neufville.<sup>81</sup> The last of the goods did not arrive from Holland until September.<sup>82</sup>

Several months after the final shipment of goods arrived a committee was appointed in Congress to investigate the

78. Barclay to Franklin, February 28, 1782, in Franklin MSS., XXIV, 112.

79. Barclay to Franklin, February 25, 1782, in Franklin MSS., XXIV, 101.

80. Barclay to Franklin, February 28, 1782.

81. de Neufville to Franklin, July 1, 1782, in Franklin MSS., XXV, III.

82. Robert Livingston to Franklin, September 13, 1782, in the Manuscript Collection of the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia).





causes of their detention in Holland. On November 1, 1782 the committee consisting of Theodorick Bland, Jonathan Jackson, and David Howell presented a lengthy report to congress in which they reached the following conclusions:

- 1) That Franklin had obtained a promise of a donation of six million livres which was to be drawn on by General Washington when the need arose.
- 2) Colonel Laurens obtained permission from the French Court to ship four millions of the six millions to America. Two millions were to be retained in France to pay for military stores. In addition Laurens obtained a grant of four million more from the Royal Treasury, and a loan of ten million from Holland, thus making a total of twenty million which could be used for the United States in Europe. 83
- 3) Franklin had no right to countermand Laurens' orders to Jackson regarding the disposition of the one and a half million shipped to Holland, in view of the settlement referred to as there was a balance of 4,214,891 livres exclusive of the one and a half million sent to Amsterdam.
- 4) That it did not appear that any "strict scrutiny had been made relative to the capacity of the frigate "South Carolina" until most of the goods had been purchased."
- 5) That Commodore Gillon had not received the Bills of Exchange, amounting to 10,000 pounds sterling, until the "South Carolina" was well out to sea. This, in spite of the fact, that the goods transferred to Continental account had been in Jackson's hands since May 14, 1781.

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83. Arrangements for the loan of ten million from Holland were completed in November of 1781. See, Franklin to John Laurens, November 8, 1781, in Wharton, Diplomatic Correspondence, IV, 838.



- 6) That Major Jackson was led to doubt Commodore Gillon's honest intentions by "some ill founded suggestions," which appeared to have come from Franklin,
- 7) That Commodore Gillon did not give Colonel Laurens a fair appraisal of the "South Carolina's" worth prior to the signing of the contract. 84

The committee recommended at the end of their report that Franklin be reprimanded for his conduct in remanding the money which was supposed to be shipped from Amsterdam. Therefore the following resolution was passed.

"That the said Min<sup>r</sup> be informed that Congress highly disapprove his conduct in so doing, as well on account of the Embarrassment into which such a Proceeding must throw the finances of these States, if practised by any person whatsoever, without a proper authority derived from Congress for so doing, as on account of such a measure being an unconstitutional appropriation of the money of these United States, which can be made only by at least nine States in Congress assembled." 85

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84. Journals of Continental Congress, XXIII, 700-704.

85. Ibid., 705.





## CHAPTER IV

### POST-WAR POLITICS AND PUBLIC DISGRACE

Commodore Gillon returned to Charlestown in the spring of 1783, and spent the remaining years of his life as an active participant in national, state, and local politics. Strangely enough, his political life was never jeopardized by the many investigations he under-went involving his European escapades.<sup>1</sup>

Though he had been cleared by the Congressional Committee inquiring into the detention of the goods and ships in Holland, he next had to answer charges brought against him by the following individuals and companies ~~to~~ whom he had become financially obligated:

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1. William Graham Sumner, brings out the fact that Gillon probably escaped a great deal of embarrassment because his wife was held in such high esteem by the people of Charleston. The Financier and Finances of the American Revolution, (New York, 1891) II, 15.



to Gillon's European commission. In February of 1783, a joint committee from the House and Senate joined together in free conference to enquire into the whole business.<sup>5</sup> On March 10 the committee brought in a long report on the decisions they had reached after a study of all the pertinent facts of the case. They came to the conclusion that with the Commodore's authority from Lowndes, and the sale of Carolina produce in Europe, he had a right to borrow £ 76,428.11.5 on the credit of the state. Furthermore, as Gillon only borrowed £ 46,725 he did not use the full credit to the amount of £ 29,703.11.5.

On the subject of Chevalier de Luxembourg's claims the committee concluded that the state was not liable as the Commodore had been wrested from his command by the said Chevalier before the expiration of his three year contract. This action nullified the other provisions in the agreement.<sup>6</sup> A resolution was then passed authorizing the Governor to write the people from whom loans were obtained for which the state was liable, and to ascertain the speediest means of payment.<sup>7</sup>

On March 15, 1783, Gillon was elected by the General

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5. House Journals, 1783, 43; 163-164.

6. Ibid., 281-284.

7. Ibid., 334.



Assembly to the Privy Council<sup>8</sup> and plunged headlong into the violent political quarrels of post-war Charlestown which raged throughout 1783-84. To understand the basic causes of this turbulent period it will be necessary to review the political situation in Charlestown before, and during, the Revolution.

The Colony of South Carolina was governed by the landed aristocracy, and wealthy Charlestown merchants. Except for an occasional outburst of democratic sentiment from the artisans and small farmers, these wealthy classes dominated the political scene before the war. Organized opposition to this leadership began to manifest itself after the occupation of Charlestown by the British in 1780-82. During that period many of the landed gentry and rich merchants put themselves under the protection of the British Crown in order to avoid the sequestration of their property. While the British controlled Charlestown the State General Assembly in session at Jacksonborough, South Carolina, ruled that the property of loyalists was to be confiscated, and that citizens who had accepted protection from the British were to be amerced.<sup>9</sup>

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8. Ibid., 344. On August 22, 1783, he was elected by the Privy Council Lieutenant Governor to fill the unexpired term of Richard Beresford. He declined the nomination, however. See, S. C. Weekly Gazette, August 30, 1783.

9. U. B. Phillips, "The South Carolina Federalists," American Historical Review, XIV, (1909), 529-532.





When the war ended the unpropertied classes calling themselves the "Whig-Republicans," began fighting to curtail the power of the aristocracy. The first issue involving the two factions was over the treatment of loyalists. The "Whig-Republicans" felt that the tories were being treated too tolerantly by the government, and that they should be driven immediately from the State. Commodore Gillon, who had bought thousands of acres of confiscated loyalist property, and wished to protect the titles to his lands, became the leader of the "Whig-Republican" faction.<sup>10</sup>

In the fall of 1783 Gillon and a Dr. James Fallon organized the "Marine Anti-Britannic Society" which seemed to be dedicated to espousing radical causes. A resolution of the club maintained that "the refugee [tory] having basely deserted America in her greatest distress and joined her perfidious foes - cannot pretend any right to settle in the country which they strove to enslave, nor to inherit the liberty, which they endeavored to destroy."<sup>11</sup>

A series of letters appearing in one of the local newspapers during October and November of 1783 was amusing, and also was indicative of the mounting class antagonism. Representing the conservative point of view was a person who signed his letters "Another Patriot," and opposed to him were a

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10. Ibid., 533.

11. State Gazette, October 15, 1783. This society was an outgrowth of the "Whig-or Smoking-Society."



"House-Carpenter" and a "Mechanic!"

"Another Patriot" in his article of October 25, 1783 claimed that he had come home from the war and found his plantation in a very dilapidated condition. To his horror he learned that house carpenters were banding together and charging a minimum wage of three dollars a day. He thought this was utterly preposterous, and predicted all sorts of stresses and strains on the local economy.<sup>12</sup> Answering the charges three days later the "House-Carpenter" violently denied that they were getting that much money and said that:

"If Another Patriot, is a patriot and gentleman, let him produce the man that demands three dollars per day.... and I'll venture to affirm, that he will be despised by us as much as the Patriot can despise him himself." <sup>13</sup>

The "Mechanic" wrote that rather than submit to such "poverty and unwholesome atmosphere" he would rather accept the invitation of the Empress of Russia who "invites Artists of all denominations to come and settle in her extensive dominions, particularly carpenters, as the means to raise a powerful navy, she offers great privileges, and an exemption of tax, to all artists without exception."<sup>14</sup>

At the November gathering of the "Marine Anti-Britannic

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12. Gazette and General Advertiser, October 25, 1783.

13. Ibid., October 28, 1783.

14. Ibid., November 1, 1783.





Society" it was decided to have the anniversary meeting of the organization every December 14 to commemorate the evacuation of Charlestown by the British.<sup>15</sup> However, the fourteenth of December fell on a Sunday in 1783 so the meeting was held on Saturday the thirteenth. Details of the meeting appeared in the Gazette and General Advertiser of December 16, 1783:

'On Saturday, the 13th Instant, a very numerous meeting of the Republican Whig-Citizens of this Capital were convened.... A very elegant Dinner, worthy of so joyous an occasion was prepared in the Long-Room [City Tavern] ushered in by a Peal from the Bells of St. Michaels Church, and by some Military Music..." 16

Twenty-six toasts were drunk at this meeting. Indicative of the pro-republican, and anti-aristocratic feeling, was one given by a member: "May the genuine spirit of Republicanism ever preside over the Councils of this State; - and may the Leaven of Aristocracy never enjoy a place therein!"<sup>17</sup>

During the spring of 1784, tension increased as acts of violence were perpetrated on Tories and Republicans alike. Christopher Gadsden accused the "Anti-Britannic Society" of fo-

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15. Ibid., November 22, 1783.

16. Ibid., December 16, 1783.

17. Ibid., December 16, 1783.



menting most of the trouble.<sup>18</sup> But this was denied by Gillon and proponents of the Whig faction. William Hornby writing to the State Gazette on this subject said:

"The Marine Anti-Britannic Society, can no more... be charged with fomenting the late riots in this city, than any other society in the State; if what I have been informed be true, that some of all the societies in town were in the mobs which opposed each other." 19

Governor Benjamin Guerard on April 28, 1784 issued a proclamation condemning the practice of certain "restless and specious individuals" who had posted handbills with the names of thirteen persons ordered to leave the state in ten days. A reward of one thousand dollars was offered to anyone giving evidence which would lead to the conviction of any of the offenders.<sup>20</sup>

On April 29 Richard Hutson, the intendant, issued an order that St. Michael's bells would be rung in the event of any

18. Gadsden writing under the nom de plume of "A Steady and Open Republican" wrote several letters to the newspaper during this time condemning the "Anti-Britannic Society" and its leaders Commodore Gillon and Dr. James Fallon. He also said many derogatory things about Gillon's war record. When Gadsden was exposed as "The Steady and Open Republican" he began writing under his own name. See, Gazette and General Advertiser, May 11, 1784; State Gazette, May 6, 1784; July 17, 1784; August 2, 1784. Gadsden's accusations were answered by William Hornby writing under the name of "Democratic Gentle Touch," and Gillon, who never used a pseudonym. See, State Gazette, May 13, 1784; July 26, 1784; August 12, 1784; August 19, 1784; September 9, 1784.

U. B. Phillips, on the other hand, centered most of the blame on the Anti-Britannic Society. "The South Carolina Federalists," American Historical Review, XIV, (1909), 529-543.

19. State Gazette, August 19, 1784.

20. Gazette and General Advertiser, April 27, 1784.



riot or attempt to disrupt the tranquillity of the city, at which signal all the peace officers, city authorities, and citizens who were so inclined, were to meet at the State House.<sup>21</sup>

There were a few other incidents during April and May.<sup>22</sup> But the situation did not reach a climax until one night in July when an armed mob paraded about the streets of the city. It was reported by the State Gazette:

"Last night this city was alarmed by the ringing of bells, beating of drums, and armed parties parading the streets; such indeed was the prevalent hubbub and confusion, that apprehensive persons could not but conceive that an universal conflagration had taken place." 23

This disturbance must have been quelled rather thoroughly by intendant Richard Hutson and his helpers. After this incident there were no more violent acts reported by the Charles-town newspapers.

In March 17, 1785 Governor Guerard ordered that all individuals who had been banished from the State, and had returned under the provisions of the peace treaty, could remain in the State only three months after the treaty stipulated that

21. Ibid., April 29, 1784.

22. There was a battle of words between William Thompson, keeper of the "City Tavern," and John Rutledge at the latter's house. The incident centered around the testimony of one of Rutledge's slaves who was sent with a message for Thompson. Thompson became incensed when Rutledge accepted the Negro's word over his own. State Gazette, April 29, 1784.

23. State Gazette, July 8, 1784.





they leave. This action by the Governor ended all anti-loyalist agitation.<sup>24</sup>

In the meantime the number and stature of Gillon's political jobs were increasing. In September of 1783, he was appointed one of the Commissioners to enforce an act passed on March 20, 1771, relative to the inspection of tobacco and flour.<sup>25</sup> On February 10, 1784, he was elected by the General Assembly as one of five delegates to represent South Carolina in Congress.<sup>26</sup> Commenting on Gillon's election a newspaper in Amsterdam said:

"It is well known that Mr. Gillon is a Hollander, born at Rotterdam; which shews, that among the Americans, merit and services are the principal steps which raise to honor and employment." 27

On February 6, 1784 Alexander Gillon was elected president of the revived Chamber of Commerce which he had been instrumental in organizing in 1773. At the meeting of the "Gentlemen

24. Phillips, "South Carolina Federalists", American Historical Review, XIV, 537.

25. Gazette and General Advertiser, September 20, 1783.

26. Journals of Continental Congress, XXVII, 646. Gillon did not attend any of the sessions of Congress in 1784 or 1785. See, Burnett, Letters of Congress, VII. (Information in preface.)

27. Quoted in the State Gazette, August 9, 1784.



in Trade" they decided to effect an institution in Charleston "to extend Commerce, encourage Industry, and adjust disputes relative to Trade and Navigation".<sup>28</sup>

During March and April of 1784 Gillon was called before a joint committee from the State Legislature to answer to the charges that Dr. Edward Bancroft, representing the Prince of Luxembourg,<sup>29</sup> laid before them. Bancroft claimed that Gillon had violated several articles in the contract he had signed with the Prince. As a result he made the following claims against the state of South Carolina:

- 1) The fourth part of all the prizes obtained from the enemy with the interest thereon.
- 2) The sum of 300,000 livres due to the Prince on the first day of June, 1783.
- 3) An indemnification of the probable loss which the Prince of Luxembourg had sustained by the employment of the ship against the Island of Providence contrary to the stipulations of the 4th and 7th Articles of the said treaty.
- 4) A reasonable indemnification for the Loss of eleven months during which the ship remained at, or within the Texel, after the expiration of the term stipulated for her departure by the second article. <sup>30</sup>

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28. City of Charleston Year Book 1883, 420-421. Alexander Gillon's name heads the list of the first 70 members of the revived Chamber. An account of this meeting is also given in the Charleston Evening Post, August 1, 1936.

29. Luxembourg's rank had been raised from Chevalier to Prince since the contract was signed.

30. Bancroft, Luxembourg Claims, 8-9.





Throughout March Bancroft presented lengthy arguments in an attempt to substantiate each of the claims. On April 8, at a meeting which Bancroft did not attend, Gillon offered some new arguments on his side. The next day one of the arbitrating committee informed Bancroft that they had decided to admit the Prince's claim of 300,000 livres for the loss of the ship, but had decided that the Prince should pay damages for the "South Carolina's" detention from December 17, 1780, to August 7, 1781. The committee claimed that Gillon would have been able to leave within the six months allowed had Luxembourg not ordered his legion to participate in the Jersey expedition.<sup>31</sup>

When Bancroft heard this he was furious and wrote two letters to John Rutledge accusing the committee of being prejudiced against his client. Because of his insinuations against their honor and justice, Rutledge wrote Bancroft on April 13 that the state would no longer proceed with the case.<sup>32</sup> Thus the Commodore escaped another investigation unscathed.

Although Gillon was deeply involved in the political affairs of the post-war period he still found time to handle his business

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31. Ibid., 39. They ended their report by saying "that Commodore Gillon used his most strenuous exertions to get the South Carolina to sea with all possible dispatch; but that he was prevented from so doing, sooner than he did by insurmountable obstacles!" See, Acts, Ordinances, and Resolves of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina Passed in the Year 1784., (Charleston, 1784), 100.

32. Ibid., 48



and real estate interests. When he returned to the city in 1783 he reopened his store on the Bay, and immediately began to sell off most of his property in the city and the country. On May 10, 1783 the Gazette and General Advertiser listed seventeen lots, a dock and warehouse, and 6,500 acres of land in the country that Gillon wished to sell.<sup>33</sup>

While he was selling the Commodore was also buying confiscated property. In February of 1785, he bought from the estate of Lieutenant Colonel William Cattell a parcel of land on the Ashley River. The sale included the valuable seat called "Ashley Hill" adjoining Arthur Middleton's plantation, now the site of Middleton Place Gardens. The property was handed over to Gillon on February 15, 1785. For the 735½ acres he paid 6,865 guineas which Henry Smith thought was "a stupendous price according to later values."<sup>34</sup>

Commodore Gillon and his wife spent a great deal of time and money on creating a beautiful garden around the mansion. The Duke De La Rochefoucault Liancourt commented on this when he stopped at "Ashley Hill" three years after the Commodore's death:

33. Gazette and General Advertiser, May 10, 1783.

34. Henry A. M. Smith, "The Baronies of South Carolina," S.C.H.G.M., XII, (April, 1911), 112.



"We made another halt at a house, formerly the property of Commodore Gillon, who died in very deranged circumstances, bordering on insolvency...The house is tolerably handsome and the garden is laid out with a more refined taste, and cultivated with more care than gardens generally are in this country." 35

In the spring of 1786 the South Carolina Legislature met in the Custom House of Charleston and passed a resolution to construct a state capital with a central location. This action was precipitated by the people of the up-country who were beginning to exert a much greater influence on the affairs of the state government.<sup>36</sup> Two factions immediately began to develop among those who owned land in the interior. General Thomas Sumter owned lands on the Wateree River and had commenced building a village there three years before. Colonel Wade Hampton, Colonel Thomas Taylor, Commodore Gillon, and others, owned lands on the Congaree River. At one session a personal dispute arose between Sumter and Gillon over the relative merits of their lands. On the following day both came armed with a small sword, and some felt that blood would surely be shed. Edward Rutledge saved the day by making a brief speech in which he complimented the patriotism of the two men. This assuaged their feelings and subdued their anger, and no harm was done.<sup>37</sup>

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35. Duke De La Rochefoucault, Travels Through The United States of North America, (London, 1799), I, 591.

36. Ramsay, History of South Carolina, II, 241.

37. Anne King Gregorie, Thomas Sumter, (Columbia, 1931), 212-213.





After much argument and discussion the site of Columbia, on the Congaree was selected because of its central location, and its being at the head of boat navigation. On March 20, 1786, Alexander Gillon, Richard Winn, Richard Hampton, and Thomas Taylor were elected commissioners for the purpose of purchasing land for the building of the town of Columbia.<sup>38</sup> These men worked on the plan for the city for nearly four years and it was not until January 9, 1790 that Gillon laid before the House of Representatives the plan of the town of Columbia.<sup>39</sup>

On May 19, 1788, Gillon was a member of the Constitutional Convention that convened in Charleston. The Commodore's political philosophy had become more conservative by this time and he argued and voted for the adoption of the Constitution. At one point in the discussion he violently opposed the motion of a delegate who proposed that a new convention be called. Gillon hopped to his feet and asked the House by what reason they supposed that if another convention met that their interest would any better provided for. He hoped that the gentlemen who voiced approval of the State Constitution in 1778 would be as pleased with the Federal Constitution proposed in 1787. In closing he said that he had represented the situation to be calm and peaceful "but it was such a calm as mariners often experience at sea, after a storm, when one ship rolls against an-

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38. House Journals, 1786, 299.

39. House Journals, 1790, 23.



other, and they sink."<sup>40</sup>

On October 23, 1787, Mrs. Mary Cripps Gillon died at "Ashley Hill."<sup>41</sup> A notation in the family Bible says that: "The disorder was an obstinate Billious Fever which lasted 8 days without any intermission except one on the Sunday."<sup>41</sup>

Two years later on February 10, 1789 Commodore Gillon married Ann Purcell, the second daughter of the Rev, Doctor Henry Purcell, rector of St. Michaels Church.<sup>42</sup> They had three children: Ann Purcell, born May 5, 1790,<sup>43</sup> Mary Susannah born July 8, 1793,<sup>44</sup> and a son, Alexander, who was born April 9, 1795, several months after the Commodore died.<sup>45</sup>

40. Jonathan Elliot, The Debates in the Several State Conventions On The Adoption Of the Federal Constitution, (Washington, 1836), IV, 286-287. Johnson claims that during one of the debates Charles Pinckney used a Latin quotation which very few understood. Commodore Gillon then got to his feet and gave one in Dutch "which he hoped would be equally as well understood by his hearers." After that there were no more quotations from a foreign tongue. Memoirs, 136.

41. Beeman, "Records From Gillon Bible," S.C.H.G.M., XIX, 146.

42. Ibid., 146.

43. Ibid., 147.

44. Ibid., 150.

45. Ibid., 147. Alexander Gillon, Jr. was later killed in a duel on Edisto Island. See, Henry A. M. Smith, "The Ashley River: Its Seats and Settlements," S. C. H. G. M., XX, (January, 1919), 46.





After his first wife's death Gillon left "Ashley Hill" to reside permanently in the Saxe Gotha district of South Carolina. He built a house on some land he owned on the Congaree River, and called his new place "Gillon's Retreat," which is near St. Matthews, South Carolina. In May of 1790 he represented the district of Saxe Gotha in the State Constitutional Convention held at Columbia.<sup>46</sup> On May 14, he was the chairman of a committee to write an ordinance to amend and carry into effect an act entitled "An Act to procure a Census of the free white Inhabitants of this State and for ascertaining the taxable property in this State."<sup>47</sup> Gillon read the plans for the Census on May 15, and the report was ordered to lie on the table for the delegates' information.<sup>48</sup> On June 3, the new constitution was adopted unanimously.<sup>49</sup>

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46. On December 3, 1784, Gillon had been elected to the House of Representatives from Charleston County. See, S. C. Gazette and Public Advertiser, December 1, 1784. By 1786, Gillon was living permanently at "Gillon's Retreat" in the Saxe Gotha district of South Carolina. He was chosen as Lieutenant Governor in 1789 but declined because of ill health. See, House Journals, 1789, 342.

47. Francis M. H. Hutson (ed.), Journal of the Constitutional Convention of South Carolina, May 10, 1790. June 3, 1790, (Columbia, 1946), 14.

48. Ibid., 15.

49. Ibid., 31. Gillon probably did not vote, for, on May 29, he was given a two days' leave of absence. Ibid., 26.



In 1791 Commodore Gillon was chairman of the committee on arrangements for entertaining President George Washington when he visited Charleston. Archibald Henderson describes how the Commodore handled a delicate social problem:

"At the banquet at the Exchange, given by the City Corporation on May 3rd, the President was to take in the Governor's lady, of course; but the question was raised by the committee of arrangements: What other fair companions should Washington have? 'Leave it to me' said the tactful Gillon, 'and I will arrange things comme il faut'. When the guests were seated the gallant Commodore's wisdom was universally approved - for at the President's left was seated Miss Claudia Smith, the wittiest woman of Charleston, and immediately before his eyes across the banquet table Mrs. Richard Shubrick, the most beautiful of Charleston's daughters! Distinction, wit, and beauty - 'what more could even the great Washington desire?'" 50

In addition to fighting against the physical deterioration caused by the gout, Commodore Gillon spent his last years involved in claims arising from his contract with the Prince of Luxembourg, and suits against his estate by the State of South Carolina. A brief resume of these claims and their ramifications will be given at this time.

President Rawlins Lowndes of South Carolina had written Commodore Gillon on January 31, 1779 that anything he did which was necessary in the way of advancing pay, issuing commissions, etc., would be "confirmed and established in the fullest extention."<sup>51</sup> That the Commodore was a little too

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50. Archibald Henderson, Washington's Southern Tour, 1791, (New York, 1923), 171-172.

51. See Page 24.



enthusiastic with the use of this power cannot be denied. But, it appears, that as a result of Lowndes authorization, the State of South Carolina assumed most of the financial burden of Gillon's involvements incurred during his European Mission.

Final settlement of the "Luxembourg Claims" was not made until 1855. The whole business was complicated by the uncertainty as to whether the Prince of Luxembourg or the French Government was due the money for the frigate "South Carolina," the confiscation of Luxembourg's estate during the French Revolution, fraudulent claims by an attorney who declared that he was representing certain seamen on the frigate, and finally, by the difficulty of accumulating the necessary facts about money owed to individuals in Europe. Before the final settlement was made South Carolina had paid out nearly \$65,000 as a result of the "Luxembourg Claims," and an additional amount to claimants involved in other of the Commodore's transactions.<sup>52</sup>

The claims against Gillon made by the State of South Carolina revolved around the method used to pay off the State's indebtedness after the war, and the Commodore's appropriation of the sums advanced him.

Until the occupation of Charlestown by the British South Carolina had financed its affairs in a successful manner. After the fall of the city the militia and other units of the

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<sup>52</sup>. D. E. Huger Smith, "The Luxembourg Claims," S.C.H.G.M., X, (April, 1909), 92-111; Wallace, History of S. C., II, 310-311.





war effort held together on a strictly volunteer basis. The men in these organizations fought on with the hopes that some day they would be at least partially reimbursed for their services.

On March 19, 1785 the General Assembly passed an ordinance appointing five commissioners to settle all the accounts against the State which had been, or that would be, brought into the auditor's office. Alexander Gillon was one of the five commissioners appointed to administer the program for the State. Those claims, considered just by the commissioners, were to be paid by treasury indents. These were interest bearing certificates of the State's indebtedness. Thousands of accounts were settled in this manner as the treasury indents could be used to purchase confiscated loyalist property at any of the public sales.<sup>53</sup>

Commodore Gillon bought and sold thousands of acres of this confiscated property. Unhappily for him the treaty of peace with England affected the titles to many of these lands, and, at the time of his death, he was trying to seek relief through the courts.<sup>54</sup>

Unfortunately for Commodore Gillon's reputation his post-war business activity did not terminate with his land specula-

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53. A. S. Salley, Jr. (ed.), Accounts Audited of Revolutionary Claims Against South Carolina Growing Out Of the Revolution, (Columbia, 1935), 3.

54. Smith, "Luxembourg Claims," S.C.H.G.M., X, 112.



tions. In December of 1793 the Commissioners of Public Accounts, who had been appointed to investigate the payment of treasury indents to individuals in South Carolina, reported to the General Assembly that they had reasons to believe that Commodore Gillon had made several misrepresentations to the State to obtain indents. As a result of this on December 17, 1793 a committee was appointed to examine all the accounts between the State and Gillon.<sup>55</sup> On December 20 the committee brought in this damning indictment:

"That after having examined the Commissioner for settling public Accounts, and the Two Treasurers, it appears to your committee that among the Monies borrowed by Commodore Gillon was Fifteen Thousand Dollars of John Wright Stanley which the Legislature provided for by An Act of Assembly passed on the 13th March 1783, under which Act the said John Wright Stanley received in full payment of his demand from the Treasurer Indents which ~~were~~ receivable for any purchases that might be made at any public Sale of Confiscated property -

**It** further appeared to your Committee that Mr. Stanley purchased at the Confiscated Sales property to the amount of Ten Thousand Dollars, and paid for the same in the afore-said Indents, which were in fact equal to Specie -

Your Committee further Report, that one of the Indents given to the said John Wright Stanley was by him transferred to Commodore Gillon in the following words 'for value received in A. Gillon's, John Joiner's & J. S. Cripp's joint note of the 11th November 1792, I assign to Alex. Gillon Esq. his Exers. Admons. or Assigns my Right and Title to the within Indent it being mutually agreed between us that the said Alex. Gillon, his Exers. Admons. or Assigns shall have no claim on me in consequence of this Endorsement'

It further appears to your Committee that Commodore Gillon made very large purchases at Confiscated Sales & that he on the 15th March 1789 received from the Treasury by Discount the sum of Five Thousand Dollars due him as assignee of the said John Wright Stanley.

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55. House Journals, 1793, 483.





Your Committee further report that Altho' the Commodore had received the full amount of the said Indent, yet by his Memorial to the Legislature Among other things sets forth that he was sued for his Responsibility to Mr. Stanley for £ 1100 Sterling (equal to 5,000 Dollars)- Your Committee further report that the Commodore not having mentioned in his Memorial that the State had paid to Mr. Stanley all his Demands, the Legislature was induced from a belief that it was still due by them to Resolve on the 12th day of February 1791 'That he Commodore Gillon be paid the sum of Five thousand Dollars, with Interest from the time he borrowed the same from Mr. Stanley....

Your Committee find that in consequence of the Revolution, the Commodore has received Five Thousand Dollars in Specie, being a second payment of the same sum.

Your Committee also report that it appears to them that the Commodore received an Indent, which included among other Articles a payment a third time for the same sum - that it appears to the Committee that Commodore Gillon by his own shewing acknowledges that the sum due in the portage Bill Book on the 17th day of April 1783 is Eleven thousand four hundred and ten pounds eleven shillings and Eight pence principal - that subsequently to that time the Commodore and Captain Joiner had Certified Accounts to various of the Crew to the principal amount of Ten thousand one hundred & forty two pounds ... which have been audited and paid forming as your Committee conceive a proper deduction from the amount due on the said Book -

That the Commodore with the knowledge thereof, afterwards, Viz. on the 14th day of April 1791 drew out of the Treasury the full amount of the original Ballence...and the interest thereon, Six thousand four hundred and Eighteen pounds 14/10 amounting in all to Seventeen Thousand, eight hundred & twenty nine pounds an 6/6 - your Committee further report that it appears that the State have not only paid the Crew of the Ship South Carolina the wages due, but also Prize Money - wishing to know if the Commodore had credited the State for its proportion, as well as the Seamen's proportion of Prize Money due them, in consequence of the various Captures made, to their Astonishment find not even a vestige in any of your public Offices of an Account between the Commodore and the State, respecting his European transaction or of prizes taken, nor was it in their power to recur to the Vouchers as the Commodore is in possession of them -

Your Committee further report that the Commodore was under and by Virtue of a Commission under the Seal of the State appointed as their agent to borrow such Sums of Money as should be required for compleating the purposes which were then in contemplation - That with that view large



Sums of Money were borrowed by him which your Committee have no proof of his ever having accounted for - 'From the foregoing Facts, it appears to your Committee and they are unanimously of Opinion That Commodore Gillon has abused the Trust placed in him by the public and has knowingly drawn from your Treasury Monies which had been previously paid...' 56

In spite of the doubt cast on Gillon's integrity by this investigation, his political supporters remained loyal, and, in the spring of 1794 elected him as a delegate to the third Congress of the United States.<sup>57</sup>

Before he left to take his seat in April, 1794, he wrote a letter to Governor Moultrie in which he tried to defend his actions regarding his acquisition of the treasury indents.

"I am the more confident in the propriety of my attending to my federal duty, from the certainty that, even after allowing credit for whatever the commissioners on public accounts have been pleased to debit me with in this last account, the State is greatly indebted to me for large sums advanced in specie during the last war, and for property sold me by the Commissioners of confiscated estates, which the public cannot support their titles to, and of course must be returned to them, and they accordingly deduct the same from the debits against me, which amounts to upwards of fifteen thousand pounds; therefore no injury can arise to the public by my short absence; for should it even be possible, that the public can make good their titles for the lands in dispute... or that any accidental errors... may cause a balance in favor of the public, I shall be at all times prepared to pay the same, at the discount of five for one, conformable to the law passed for the relief of

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56. House Journals, 1793, 538-541.  
Further information about this can be found in the Letter-Book, Commissioners of Public Accounts, May 23, 1791 - November 17, 1797 (in South Carolina Historical Commission, Columbia, S. C.), 16, 34, 48, 50, 51, 55, 56, 58.

57. Charleston Year Book, 1884, 342.





John Lewis Gervais, and others indebted to the public for purchases payable in indents, or to pay the same in indents of the state. 58

In the fall of 1794 Commodore Gillon returned to his home at "Gillon's Retreat." Shortly afterwards on October 6, 1794 he died at the age of 53 of the "Gout in his head, and stomach, with a contagious fever which lasted only eight days." 59

The Commodore's death interrupted the progress of the suit brought against him by the Commissioners of Public Accounts, and it was not until November of 1801 that the Court decided that Gillon's estate was liable for \$42,571. Apparently many of Gillon's claims against the State of South Carolina were disallowed. 60

By 1801 Commodore Gillon's large estate was completely dissipated. 61 Because her father was a clergyman Mrs. Ann Purcell

58. Letter quoted in Smith, "Luxembourg Claims," S.C.H.G.M., X, 112-113.

59. Beeman, "Gillon's Bible," S.C.H.G.M., X, 150.

60. Smith, "Luxembourg Claims," S.C.H.G.M., X, 113.

61. Gillon's will was dated May 9, 1792, and witnessed by William Thompson, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, James Otis Prentiss, and Benjamin Hart. Pierce Butler, and the Commodore's wife, Ann Purcell Gillon, were named executor and executrix respectively.

The principal part of his estate which consisted of "Gillon's Retreat" on the Congaree, was left to his immediate family. In addition he left over 2,000 acres of land and various small sums of money to other close relatives and friends. See, Will of Alexander Gillon, Will Book "C," 1793-1800, 178. Probate Office, Charleston, S. C.





Gillon was granted on October 20, 1802 a pension of £ 60 yearly from the "Society For the Relief Of The Widows & Orphans Of The Clergy Of The Protestant Episcopal Church In South Carolina".<sup>62</sup> The next year due to her "melancholy situation" the Society granted her request for an increased yearly compensation of £ 20.<sup>63</sup>

On May 14, 1844 Ann Purcell Gillon died at Litchfield, Connecticut.<sup>64</sup>

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62. Minutes of the Society For the Relief Of the Widows & Orphans Of the Clergy Of The P. E. Church In South Carolina From April 1762 To October 1813, I, 151. (In possession of the Society in Charleston, S. C.)

63. Ibid., 157.

64. Beeman, "Gillon's Bible", S.C.H.G.M., XIX, 147.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Alexander Gillon was a colorful and interesting character who turned out to be a distinct liability to the State of South Carolina. A short resumé of the principal parts of his career should suffice to clarify this point.

Like most people who settled in America, Alexander Gillon arrived as a poor man with humble antecedents. Capitalizing on the opportunities offered in the Colony of Carolina he built a thriving business, and became one of the wealthiest men in Charleston. When the Revolution began many of the opulent citizens of the city were unenthusiastic about the prospects of war with the mother country, and were unwilling to risk their fortunes on the new government. Gillon, however, immediately cast his lot with the Revolutionists by offering his services to the Continental Congress. Later he gave up a lucrative contract with the government to accept the command of the South Carolina Navy. The Commodore's efforts in that capacity - sincere though they might have been - caused nothing but trouble and expense to his state. South Carolina finally collected





\$115,000 in prize money, but this amount did not compare with the cost of Gillon's European involvements.

A much greater opportunity to be of service to his state was presented to Commodore Gillon when he returned from the war. During the turbulent post-war period when the people of South Carolina were trying to make the necessary economic and political adjustments which the times demanded, Gillon was elected to many positions of trust and responsibility. When he accepted these offices it was his duty to help bring order out of chaos. Instead of that he betrayed the trust placed in him, and taking advantage of the confusion, appropriated public funds for his own use. This unscrupulous action overshadows any positive contribution he might have made to his state or nation.



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